

# California History

spring 1978





THE CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, founded in 1871, works to preserve the historical source materials which build cultural understanding; to serve as a clearing house for scholarship which extends historical knowledge; and, by presenting to the public historical publications, programs, and services, to enable people to examine, evaluate, and question the traditions that shape their lives in California today. All are invited to join.

Published continuously by the Society since 1922, *California History* is the only magazine exclusively devoted to California's history from pre-Columbian to modern times. Illustrated articles, pictorial essays, and book reviews explore the state's social, economic, political, intellectual, ethnic, and aesthetic heritage, encouraging examination of the interplay between the past and present.

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#### COVER

Under the watchful eyes of Yankee overseers, Chinese laborers built California's railroads, reclaimed the Delta, and nursed the state's infant agriculture, including its vineyards. This special issue of *California History* focuses on the Chinese experience in California. *Vineyard photograph from Title Insurance and Trust Collection, CHS Library.*

# California History

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The Magazine of the California Historical Society



# New Chapters in



*Many immigrants from the Kwantung agricultural region of China dispersed throughout California.*



# Chinese-American History

"It would be impossible to trace the history of the Chinese in this country without at the same time writing the history of California from 1850 to 1900," observed Carey McWilliams in his groundbreaking social history, *Brothers Under the Skin* (1943). Certainly it would be impossible to predict the course of California's development if a vast pool of Chinese workers had not supplied the labor that was required for developing the state's impatient fledgling economy.

It is possible, however, to point out a few of the contributions made by the Chinese to their adopted land, although most information on the Chinese in California has been researched and written by non-Chinese scholars who work from limited primary sources. Popularly recognized as the greatest Chinese achievement is their work between 1865 and 1869 on the Central Pacific link of the transcontinental railroad. Without their manpower, which numbered some 12,000 workers, the railroad that opened up the vast territory and wealth of the West to national development could not have been built for decades to come.

Much less known are the activities of the Chinese following the completion of the railroad for which large numbers were first brought to this country. Upon discharge, these thousands of men turned their energies to the occupations with which they were more familiar. Essentially an agricultural people—most of them came from a 300-square-mile delta region of Kwangtung Province in South China—they dispersed throughout California's fifty-eight counties, with larger concentrations

Mr. Chinn has been active in Chinese American history for many years. In 1935 he founded *Chinese Digest*, the country's first English-language newspaper for Chinese Americans. In 1963 he invited friends to join him in creating the Chinese Historical Society of America, of which he is now a director and, since 1966, editor of its *Bulletin*. He has received awards of merit from the California Historical Society (1970), the Conference of California Historical Societies (1976), and the American Association for State and Local History (1976).

Mr. Chinn is president of Gollan Typography, Inc., in San Francisco.

in Northern California in areas such as San Francisco, Alameda, Sacramento, Yuba, Placer, Fresno, and Santa Clara counties. In the San Joaquin delta region, they reclaimed large sloughs and turned the bottomland into some of the richest farmland in the world. They fished in the seas and bays, proving nature's bountifulness to skeptical Yankees and bringing to the gastronomic table such delights as the bay shrimp and the once-abhorred abalone.

Working diligently in nurseries and orchards, the Chinese coaxed young plants to grow. In 1875 in Oregon they nurtured a new cherry tree, gratefully named Bing after the man who carefully cultivated its fruits. Across the country in De Land, Florida, a once-Californian Chinese developed in 1888 the hardy all-season Lue Gim Gong orange, which transformed a crop of limited production potential into one making possible the great citrus industry in Florida and California. Lue was awarded the Wilder Medal by the United States Department of Agriculture in 1912 for his contribution.

Less dramatically, anonymous Chinese built the countless rock walls—constructed without cement or mortar—which criss-cross Northern California. Still visible a century later in areas such as the Napa Valley are limestone wine-aging tunnels, many miles of beautiful walls, and hundreds of magnificent stone bridges spanning rivers and creeks.

Today, increasing numbers of researchers are seeking information about long-neglected, indeed unknown, aspects of California's early history. Responding to the challenge raised by historian Carey McWilliams and by groups of people with new-found voices, younger generations of historians now recognize that the roles played by racial and ethnic groups and working-class people are essential components to an understanding of the nature and development of the American nation. Accordingly, this special issue of *California History* brings to readers several new articles which shed light on aspects of the Chinese experience in America which have remained



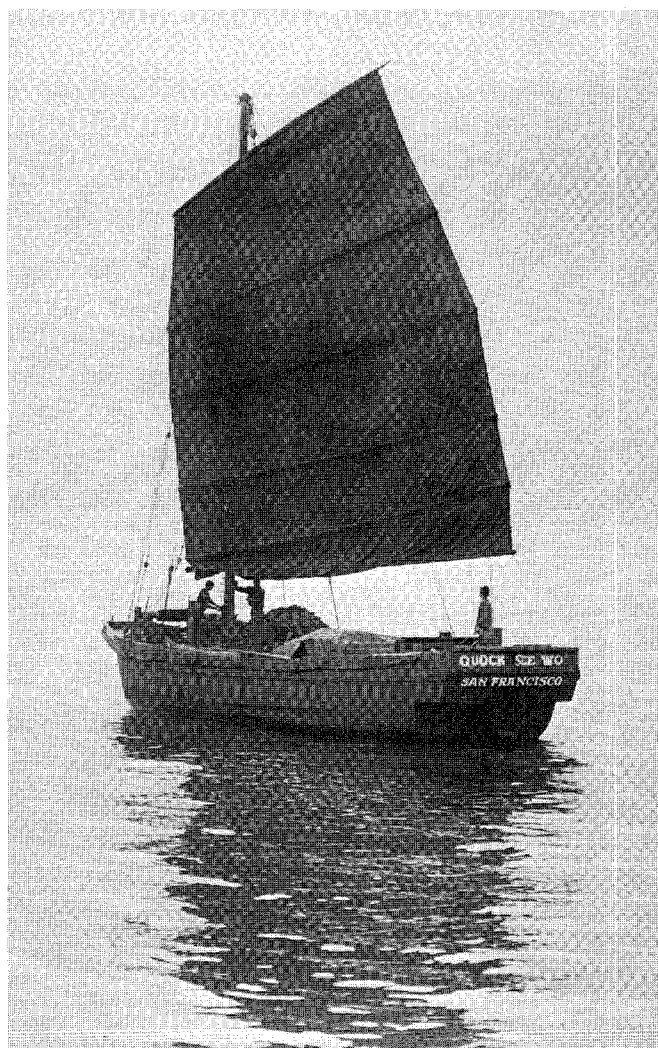
*Chinese fishermen combed California's bays for shrimp and oysters and introduced such delights as abalone and squid (far right, shown drying on racks at Monterey) to American cuisine.*

largely uninvestigated. They do much to clarify our understanding about the parts played by the Chinese in the drama of early California history and perhaps will spur further research in the field.

The attitudes and events leading to the exclusion of the Chinese from the United States in the 1880's—the first occasion on which any immigrant group was denied entry to this land of immigrants—is of sufficient importance to warrant two articles focusing on the exclusion controversy and the expediency of the political climate of the times. Cheryl Cole's article investigates California's capitalist and entrepreneurial forces, largely ignored by historians, who resisted the popular pressures for exclusion on economic grounds until party politics forced them to revise their position on the "Chinese question." David Anderson's study of the national and international perspectives leading to exclusion illuminates the limitations of the nation's loyalty to treaties and sensitivity to international diplomacy when confronted with strong domestic pressure for exclusion legislation.

Future research might explore the perspectives of the victims of exclusion and how the laws affected their daily existence on this continent. Perhaps this responsibility rests with Chinese historians, for the main sources for this kind of study are the memories of the rapidly-vanishing first-generation elders who are still so reluctant to talk about their past.

This special issue's fascinating investigation by Robert Schwendinger of the Chinese contributions to the American merchant marine and the photo essay by Robert Weinstein about the Pacific Mail Steamship Company vessels that played such a large part in the Chinese immigrant's experience are a first, to my recollection. Many Chinese have probably wondered, this writer included, about the mode of transportation that was used to bring so many thousands of their countrymen across the Pacific. In the 1920's this writer made his first trip to China aboard an old President liner and experienced traveling in steerage class deep within the ship. While accommoda-



tions had improved considerably by this time, one could still empathize, stuck belowship as we were, with the immigrants' feelings of claustrophobia and helplessness so clearly recreated within these pages.

Joan Trauner's article about how the Chinese functioned as medical scapegoats in nineteenth-century San Francisco because of the lack of scientific knowledge about disease and, as a corollary, how public health policy and prejudice prevented "modern" science and health care from penetrating Chinatown's invisible walls is a perceptive investigation into the dynamics between the larger society and the isolated Chinese subculture. Her work in largely overlooked public documents reveals how much information can be gleaned from a thorough and logical historical approach, and the reader senses her own discovery as the story unfolds from the official records of the period.





H. M. Lai's article on the Angel Island immigration facility enables the reader to appreciate the train of events and legislative measures that span nearly a century of immigrant detention in the San Francisco Bay area. We come to empathize with the despair which new immigrants must have felt on their arrival in the Golden State and understand the desperate measures they took to secure release from confinement.

Only in this generation have racial animosities abated enough to make possible an accurate accounting of the nation's treatment of immigrant groups. Today's modicum of acceptance, however, in no way obviates the need for a great deal of revision and reinterpretation of yesterday's printed books in order to focus them for future readers. New research such as evidenced throughout this special issue of *California History* will greatly increase the dimensions of our written historical record.

It is a telling commentary on the influence of the past on the present that despite today's proliferating research in California's history, the number of Chinese scholars conducting investigations remains limited. In part this situation can be explained by the early experience of the Chinese in this country, particularly in California where their numbers greatly exceeded that of any other state. (Chinese, Chinese-Americans, and Americans of Chinese descent in California now number between 200,000 and 250,000, some 30 percent of the nation's Chinese population.)

Shortly after the first Chinese immigrated to California, an anti-Chinese movement began to gather momentum. A telling blow was struck in 1854, when the California Supreme Court established limits for Chinese participation in community affairs. In *People vs. Hall*, a white citizen was charged with a murder to which a





*Exclusion laws cut off the largely male immigrant population from the possibility of family life. Public scribes wrote letters to the overseas families of the illiterate.*

Chinese houseboy was the sole witness. When the defendant was convicted on the strength of the Chinese man's testimony, the case was appealed. California law of the period forbade Native Americans from testifying for or against a white man, and the California Supreme Court subsequently ruled that "Chinese were Indians" and therefore ineligible to testify. In the words of the court: "Otherwise to let the Chinese testify in a court of law would see them at the polls, in the jury box, and upon the bench, and in our legislative halls." Statutory provisions such as this one resulted in untold numbers of arbitrary cruelties perpetrated against Chinese people in California and established among them a lingering climate of suspicion and fear. (The 1854 statute was not repealed until 1872, eighteen years later.)

This particular law did even more damage than is readily apparent. Over the decades it destroyed Chinese people's confidence in American society, for in essence it gave free license to Caucasians to abuse or murder Chinese people at will (rarely would a white man testify against another). As the years passed, the Chinese began to withdraw in self-protection from the isolated rural areas of the state and move back to urban communities

where their numbers, at least, offered some measure of security. This, in turn, eventually evoked further criticism of the Chinese as being "clannish."

Recent generations, however, are coming forward to take part in the affairs of the larger community. As Superior Court Judge Harry Low of San Francisco recently summarized:

Because we are different, there is a strong likelihood that we shall in some way always be set apart. Many Americans still consider "American" as synonymous with white, and non-whites as foreigners. It has only been in recent years that Chinese Americans have fully participated in community life. Our participation and influence is yet developing and has yet to reach full maturity.

Chinese history in America as told by the Chinese has only recently been emerging from a past that embraces more than 125 years. When the Chinese became the first foreigners to be excluded by law from entering the United States in 1882, the almost entirely male Chinese population already residing in the country was cut off from normal development and presumably doomed to extinction because the men were stranded without families. According to United States laws, however, a child



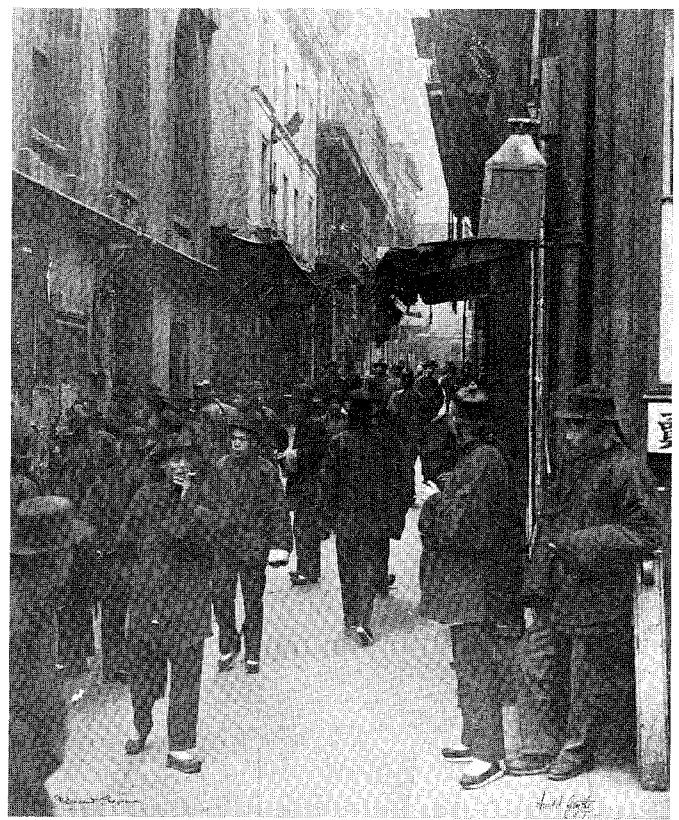
*Memories of the exclusion laws, white hostility, and violence died hard among Chinese immigrants and contributed to their isolation from white American culture.*

born in the United States is a citizen, and the child of a citizen, wherever the child's residence, inherits his parent's citizenship. After the 1906 earthquake and fire in San Francisco destroyed vital statistic records, some Chinese claimed citizenship for themselves and their offspring but listed both real and fictional children. The recording of fictional citizen-children created a "slot" for new immigrants from China who could purchase the name and, if clever, enter the country as a citizen. While "paper" sons and daughters enabled would-be immigrants to circumvent the harsh exclusion act, the illegal nature of the procedure firmly discouraged the chronicling of Chinese history in America until recent years.

Only in the last two decades, with the loosening of immigration laws and the concurrent easing in attitudes towards Orientals, have most Chinese dared to "open up" with their family stories. With the formation of the Chinese Historical Society of America in 1963 in San Francisco, the first concrete steps were taken to record the Chinese side of this history as they themselves lived it.

Some apprehensions of past discrimination and reprisals remain to haunt the older generation, and their fears are periodically relayed to their children. Even during the Great Depression of the 1930's and for a period after World War II, few Chinese were able to buy homes outside of their limited districts without major difficulties. Some stereotypes carried over from the nineteenth century remain with us today.

Unfortunately, it may well be that the first few decades of the Chinese experience in California—if not those after the turn of the century—can be considered lost chapters of their history. The first waves of pioneers to reach California, for all practical purposes, were men whose goal was rapid acquisition of money to enable them to return to China and support their families through the rest of their days. Most immigrants were illiterate. Few Caucasian people knew their names, and the Caucasian phonetic pronunciation of their Chinese first names did little to identify them accurately. Only a few



Chinese mastered English and recorded their experiences. Before the 1880's there was but a handful of American-born Chinese, and it was not until this new generation came into full maturity that roots developed and the deeper meaning of family life gave substance to their existence and identity. But by then few cared to record the past.

These inheritances are but some of the experiences that many Chinese regard as legitimate reasons for their attitudes and hesitancy about participation in the larger community. However, with the growth of a more enlightened society and the active concern of the present Chinese generation, most of these problems are gradually disappearing. The Chinese today have become involved in nearly every profession as well as civic and governmental affairs.

The first Chinese in America had envisioned themselves only as brief sojourners in a foreign land. But the courage that impelled the first pilgrims to embark for America gave some a chance to experience the meaning of freedom. Their history as it unfolds on these pages and in future writings may further legitimize their role as American citizens and integral partners in our future.

*The photograph on page 2 is from the Title Insurance and Trust Collection, CHS Library; on pages 5, 6, and 7, from the CHS Library; on page 4, courtesy the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.*



# CHINESE EXCLUSION:

## the capitalist perspective of

The immigration of Orientals to California has formed a unique chapter in the American historical experience. The first of California's Asian immigrants, the Chinese, contributed greatly to the state's economic growth through their labor in the mines, in agriculture, and on the railroads. Their presence, however, also raised complex economic, cultural, and political questions that eventually resulted in the federal Exclusion Act of 1882 which prohibited further immigration of Chinese laborers to the United States.

During the thirty-year period from 1850 to 1880, anti-Chinese agitators in California captured the news spotlight, suggesting to East Coast observers—and later generations of historians—that there was agreement among Californians on the need to seriously restrict or altogether exclude Chinese immigration. Consensus

Ms. Cole is in the Ph.D. program in history at the University of California at Davis, specializing in United States and East Asian history. She also works on the research staff of the California Post-secondary Education Commission, the state coordinating agency for higher education in California.

on the Chinese issue, however, never existed. At least one influential element of California's citizenry, faced with the challenge of balancing a number of economic and political interests, remained largely ambivalent on the question of Chinese immigration, at least until the late 1870's.

This group is well represented by the editors of the *Sacramento Union* newspaper. On cultural and social matters they were often as anti-Chinese as most Californians; on economic questions, however, their capitalist and business interests forced them to recognize the many benefits that the Chinese labor force afforded for the rapid development of California's economy. In politics on the state and national level, they represented Republican party interests that felt particularly bound to uphold the idea of justice under the law for all persons, regardless of race, and to condemn the anti-Chinese rioters who hoped to force the Chinese from California by physical terror.

During the 1850's and 1860's this significant business segment took an ambivalent and sometimes openly pro-

# SACRAMENTO

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SACRAMENTO, MONDAY

## THE SACRAMENTO UNION.

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# the *Sacramento Union*, 1850-1882

Chinese stance that served to counterbalance the mounting exclusion forces. During the 1870's, however, a number of factors led the editors of the *Union*, and the pro-business Republican interests they represented, to back the exclusion movement. Their support proved vital to the eventual passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882.

The "Chinese question," as it was early labeled, was exploitively and inextricably intertwined with other issues. This helps explain the often recognized irony that the Chinese immigrants were not the essential ingredient in the anti-Chinese movement.<sup>1</sup> Chinese immigrants ventured to California to earn money in her mines and fields with the intent of returning home to China to establish a higher standard of living for themselves. While sojourners in the United States, they remained at the mercy of white Californians and subject to the economic and social vicissitudes of the developing California frontier.

Most research on the Chinese in California has centered geographically on San Francisco, not only because

the city housed the largest number of the state's Chinese but also because it became the center of the anti-Chinese movement. During the 1850's and 1860's, however, Sacramento served as the base for Chinese working in the Mother Lode mines, on the railroads, and in valley agriculture. Official population statistics for Sacramento before 1870 do not accurately reflect the considerable contact between whites and Chinese in Sacramento. By 1870 Sacramento ranked second only to San Francisco in the numbers of its Chinese inhabitants, and, in fact, the Chinese name for Sacramento was Yee Fow or "city of second importance."<sup>2</sup> Sacramento and San Francisco were also said to harbor the strongest anti-Chinese feeling in the state, Sacramento acknowledged to be a "strongly anti-Chinese community."<sup>3</sup>

Most historians of the Chinese experience in California also have relied extensively on San Francisco newspaper accounts of the anti-Chinese movement, particularly papers which represented the interests of the Democratic party and of workingmen. The *Alta California*, a decidedly Democratic San Francisco jour-

# DAILY UNION.

MORNING, AUGUST 25, 1873. PRICE FIVE CENTS.

<p>ANCE.</p> <p>MUTUAL</p> <p>COMPANY,</p> <p>ornia.</p> <p>STREET,</p> <p>nto.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SACRAMENTO DAILY UNION.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">(From our Second Edition of Saturday.)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>BY OVERLAND TELEGRAPH.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">[SPECIAL DISPATCHES TO THE UNION.]</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>DOMESTIC NEWS.</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">A Steamer Blown Up—Twelve Persons Lost and</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>SENTIMENT IN NEVADA COUNTY.</b></p> <p>Editors Union: Political matters are looking bright with us. The nominations of the Republican Convention were of the right kind of men, who will, if elected, carry out the wishes of the people in opposing railroad exactions and increase of power of monopolies, subsidies, Goat Island schemes and the selfish operations of rings. The platforms of the two parties are not essentially different. It has</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>PACIFIC COAST ITEMS.</b></p> <p>Gov. Boon will speak in Sikeston Aug. 30th. The Vallejo Society of California Pioneers have decided to celebrate their anniversary this year at Napa.</p> <p>The San Pedro Railroad is taxed to its full capacity in the transportation of coal, iron and other railroad material.</p> <p>An order has been given for the survey of the Castas Pass and Ojai Rancho for a railroad route from Santa Barbara.</p>
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nal, has probably been the most frequently quoted by investigators. Several others heavily consulted by historians to retrace the events of those years include the *Call*, a mechanics' and workingmen's paper; the anti-capital and pro-labor *Bulletin*; and the more neutral, half-Democratic and half-Republican *San Francisco Chronicle*.<sup>4</sup> Yet, San Francisco's perspective did not represent California generally, and study of the Sacramento outlook provides an enlightening contrast.

San Francisco was a workingman's city, a developing industrial and urban center dominated by manufacturing and shipping interests, while Sacramento's economy was based in agriculture and town merchandising. Sacramento merchants supplied the hardware and provisions necessary to sustain miners, railroad workers, and farmers in the foothills and the valley. The decision to move the state capital to Sacramento in 1854 stimulated accommodation industries such as hotels and restaurants and allowed the city to reap the benefits of being the seat of state government. In short, Sacramento's economy was oriented toward traditional agricultural and business interests in which the independent entrepreneur remained the central figure.

While San Francisco was a decidedly Democratic community, Sacramento was more conservative and came to be characterized as Republican. In fact, California's Republican party was born in Sacramento in 1854 when a group of anti-slavery Sacramentans, including railroadmen Huntington, Hopkins, and Crocker, were gathered together by Cornelius Cole, a disenchanted Democrat and successful Sacramento businessman. Throughout the 1850's the Democratic party controlled California politics and government, electing six of California's first seven governors and seven of the first eight U.S. senators and controlling all but one state legislature from 1849 to 1862. By 1859, however, the new Republican party had hopelessly split California's powerful Democratic party, and during the 1860's the Republican party became California's re-

spectable political leader, benefitting from Civil War patriotism and the party's advocacy of the transcontinental railroad. This essay investigates the as yet inadequately studied opinions of these Republicans and businessmen, as expressed in a Sacramento newspaper that became the major spokesman for California Republicanism—the *Union*.<sup>5</sup>

The first issue of the *Daily Union*—named not for any sectional politics, but after the group of six printers who “united” as Hanlicker and Company to form the paper—was published on March 19, 1851. Passing through numerous owners during 1851 and 1852, the paper was purchased in 1853 by a trio of men under the banner of the J. Anthony Company. James Anthony, H. M. Larkin, and Paul Morrill ran the *Union* until 1875. The company's office was located on Third Street between J and K streets. Anthony was the businessman and proprietor of the paper; Morrill was the printer; and Larkin was listed as the publisher. Scanty records indicate that Morrill was born in 1812 of a “liberal” and “highly honored” New Hampshire family and therefore probably arrived in California with money. Morrill's partners were also originally northeasterners, Anthony from Pennsylvania and Larkin from Connecticut. Anthony was also said to have a considerable sum of money at the time he entered the business. The three apparently possessed experience as newspapermen in the East and from the beginning were bent upon putting out the best newspaper in California. Indeed, the *Union* proved to be so well produced that it steadily gained in circulation and business and was described as “second to no journal in the state.” Other distinctions earned by the paper, which surely owed much to its location in the state capital, included being the cheapest daily in California and “the largest double sheet daily in the United States.”<sup>6</sup>

In 1875 Anthony and Company sold the *Union*, which then merged with another local daily, the *Record*, which had been established in 1867 as the recognized



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*The Union's editorial policy was closely aligned with the Republican party platform.*

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organ of the Central Pacific Railroad. William H. Mills, an enterprising young printer who arrived in California in 1862 from Fayette County, Indiana, served as the manager and editorial director of the renamed *Record-Union*. Under each of its owners and editors, both before and after the 1875 merger, the *Union* was widely recognized as the most powerful newspaper in the state,<sup>7</sup> and an 1893 appraisal rendered this impressive judgment:

Never in the history of journals has there been a journal that has so entered into the lives, feelings, sentiments and affections of a constituency, nor wielded greater power, "making and unmaking governors and senators and swaying the balance upon the great questions of National as well as State importance."<sup>8</sup>

Even in the post-statehood decades California newspapers were highly politicized. The *Union's* editors, of course, had promised in their first issue to remain politically neutral and independent, but in the years before formation of the Republican party, the *Union* editors, along with a considerable majority of Sacramentans, supported the conservative Whig party as "our ticket."<sup>9</sup> During the national elections in 1860, the paper strongly helped sway the traditionally Democratic California to the Northern cause. Except for a brief interlude from about 1873 to 1875, the *Union's* editorial policy throughout the period from 1852 to 1882 was closely aligned with the Republican party platforms.<sup>10</sup> Opinions expressed in the *Union* represented those of a significant and influential sector, sufficiently so to justify this investigation of the *Union's* editorial opinions on the "Chinese question."

Chinese immigration to California was first spurred by the Gold Rush in 1849, and many Chinese people passed through Sacramento on their way to the foothills. Sacramentans thought these wagonloads of Chinese or "Celestials" quite a spectacle.

Five large wagons filled with swarthy, chattering Chinese packed at sixes and sevens—"kinder permiskusly" [kind of promiscuously]—were passed by us in the upper part of J Street Saturday morning, *en route* for the mines.<sup>11</sup>

Yet even in the fifties, *Union* editors often expressed alarm at Chinese immigration and described the "Chinese question" as "one of the most important social and political problems of the age. . . ." They characterized the immigration as an historic convergence, "East meets West," in which China's teeming population might any day overrun America's vulnerable Pacific Coast outpost. The *Union* editors' opinion undoubtedly reflected that of most Californians who were alarmed at the increasing presence of so alien a people and who believed the Chinese to be a racially inferior people who could never settle in California as the social equals of whites.<sup>12</sup>

Because most of the early immigrants worked in the Mother Lode mines, the people most affected by the Chinese presence were miners. American miners, of course, were opposed to immigrant miners of many nationalities—French, Spanish, Mexicans, and Pacific Islanders—but particularly to Chinese "cheap labor."<sup>13</sup> Throughout the 1850's *Union* articles described efforts by white miners to drive the Chinese out of the mining counties.<sup>14</sup> Reflecting this concern, a visitor to Sacramento from New York in 1852 wrote home about his impression of the seriousness of the situation:

The principal discussion in the city and the mines at the present time is the question of permitting Chinese labor in the mines. . . . Meetings have been held in different places in the mines and this city for the purpose of driving them from the mines entirely.<sup>15</sup>

Notions that Chinese immigrants were "coolies" or





bonded slaves—although most Chinese traveled to California as freely as any other immigrants—were widely held.

The *Union* editors were as anti-Chinese as most Californians, and at times they expressed wholehearted agreement with rampaging white miners. In an 1859 editorial, for example, the editors concluded that Chinese labor degraded American labor, that Chinese immigration would ruin California as a workingman's paradise, that Chinese immigration discouraged European immigration to California, that Chinese "cheap labor" only benefitted capitalists, and that capitalists would exploit all laborers and "sell our American birth-right," throwing the "pearls of American liberty and equality before swine. . . ."<sup>16</sup> Yet, despite such vehement editorial opinions, three important factors restrained the *Union* editors' support of white miners and forced

them to maintain an ambivalent position on Chinese immigration.

The Foreign Miners' Tax law, initially passed in 1850, imposed a prohibitive tax on all non-native born miners. In the first six years, however, it became apparent that it was financially expedient for the state to levy a more moderate tax which would bring it considerable revenue. By 1856 a standard tax of \$4 a month had been set, a rate which remained in force until the Foreign Miners' Tax was declared unconstitutional in 1870.<sup>17</sup>

Between 1850 and 1870, almost \$5 million was collected from the tax, a sum which amounted to one-half of the state's total income from all sources. After 1855, Chinese miners paid 98 percent of all such taxes, and state officials ignored what they knew to be the unconstitutionality of the law in order to exploit Chinese miners for this revenue.<sup>18</sup>



*Union editorials in the late 1850's warned that driving the Chinese out of mining would result in severely reduced miners' tax revenue for Sacramento.*

In the late 1850's, *Union* editors first called the attention of its statewide readers to the fact that state and county government depended for its very existence on taxes paid by the Chinese. (Revenue from the miners' tax amounted to \$1,200 in one month alone in Sacramento County.<sup>19</sup>) Although white miners continually pressed for higher and higher taxes on foreign miners, the *Union* editors were conscious that the tax had to be kept at a moderate level so as not to drive the Chinese out of mining entirely. In 1855, for example, the Chinese had left the mines in great numbers as a result of raised tax rates, but subsequent reduction in the rates caused them to depart again from the cities for the mines, leaving Sacramento's I Street almost completely deserted.<sup>20</sup> In 1858 *Union* editors stated plainly that exclusion of Chinese immigrants would "operate heavily upon the treasuries of the mountain counties, as well as upon that of the State," and that "if the exodus from the mines . . . continues . . . the mountain counties will be pretty sure to regret the passage of [any] law prohibiting the Chinese from mining. . . ." <sup>21</sup> The *Union* also claimed to prefer the employment of Chinese in the mines because it kept them from "loafing in the cities [where] they are perfect nuisances. . . ." <sup>22</sup>

Another reason for the *Union*'s ambivalence on the question of Chinese labor in the mines during the fifties and early sixties was its Republican party moral persuasions. Although the *Union* frequently stated that the Chinese were racially inferior and a cultural blight in California, at other times they insisted on equal treatment for the Chinese under California's laws. Concluding in 1858 that total exclusion of Chinese immigrants would be "contrary to the spirit of Republican institutions," the *Union* adopted a "law and order" stance that characterized its ambivalent position on the "Chinese question." <sup>23</sup>

*Union* editors urged that as long as the United States maintained trade and social intercourse treaties with China and imposed special taxes on the Chinese after

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*State and county government depended for its very existence on miners' taxes paid by the Chinese.*

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their arrival, simple justice compelled the nation's police and laws to protect the Chinese from abuse at the hands of white agitators. Typical of the *Union*'s position on mining county violence was its response in 1858 when 150 white miners in the Sacramento County community of Folsom attempted to drive 200 "terror-stricken Celestials" from their homes and the claims they worked for the Natoma Ditch Company. The miners were convinced that the ditch company was gaining a "monopoly" in the area because it employed Chinese "cheap labor." Seventeen independent miners were eventually arrested and brought to Sacramento for trial for their actions, where the company president claimed impartiality in hiring practices and testified against the riotous white miners. *Union* editors, sympathizing with the company and the Chinese, expressed outrage at the behavior of the white offenders and stated that their concern was not with economic questions but with the moral issues of law, order, and justice for the Chinese laborers. <sup>24</sup>

A third factor affecting the *Union* editorial opinion on the Chinese was the editors' belief that the Chinese were particularly well-suited for certain types of labor. The *Union* advocated in 1862, for example, that Chinese farm laborers ought to be used to reclaim the Tule lands of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. (In fact, this idea had been circulating for some years, and the Chinese did later prove instrumental in reclaiming the delta for agriculture.) *Union* editors concluded that the presence of the Chinese was tolerable as long as they undertook "labor which Americans would not condescend to perform," such as menial or domestic service,



and "accept[ed] compensation which Americans would not receive." The *Union* was also well aware that California's capitalists and merchants, a small yet influential group, supported the use of Chinese labor and made their opinions heard in the state legislature. One Sacramento's "Letter to the Editor" in 1862 stressed that no one should "ignore the existence of the *many white men and their business interests which profit by their presence*," because every California farmer and manufacturer needed this "womanlike labor."<sup>25</sup>

**D**uring most of the sixties, the Civil War dominated the attentions of Americans, and anti-Chinese agitation in California subsided, relegating the "Chinese question" to the back burner. The sixties were also economically prosperous years for most Californians, including workingmen.<sup>26</sup> Finally, during these years most Chinese continued to labor in the mines or on the railroads, avoiding potential conflict with urban workingmen. In 1869, however, as the transcontinental railroad neared completion, the "Chinese question" took on a new meaning to certain Californians, and to *Union* editors in particular. Suddenly, the new possibilities of trade with China wiped away earlier ambivalences and caused many California capitalists now to support Chinese immigration vigorously.

The ground-breaking ceremony for the Pacific section of the transcontinental railroad had been held in Sacramento on January 8, 1863. In the autumn of that year, work having progressed as far as Auburn, Irish laborers went on strike for higher wages. In response, E. B. Crocker, one of the four Sacramento Republican financiers of the Pacific Railroad, immediately sent to Sacramento for Chinese workers to break the strike. The Chinese worked so energetically that Crocker kept them on and soon issued a call for 5,000 more. Even-

tually on the Sierra stretch of the railroad more than 11,000 Chinese—or "Crocker's pets," as they were nicknamed—worked under the foremanship of 2,500 Caucasians, mostly Irish. Progressing through Nevada and Utah, 10,000 more Chinese and 2,000 whites worked at a frantic pace to reach Promontory by May 10, 1869. It was widely agreed that the railroad could never have been finished on schedule without the diligent Chinese laborers.<sup>27</sup>

The completion of the railroad meant, among other things, that inauguration of the long dreamed-of trade with China and Japan was finally possible. *Union* editors enthusiastically claimed that the China trade was California's "destiny." "What are we here [on the Pacific Coast] for but to cultivate commerce with Oriental nations?"<sup>28</sup>

The *Union's* depiction of the Chinese in China suddenly improved when the Chinese became potential trade partners. The *Union* no longer wrote about Chinese savagery and barbarism, but, for example, in March of 1867 informed its readers that the civil service system, recently introduced in the United States Congress, was not an American invention but was borrowed from the great Chinese Empire where scholarship and promotion based on merit had long been held in highest esteem. In fact, the editors observed, "barbarians" is a term which may be more justly and accurately applied to other people than to the Mongolian race."<sup>29</sup>

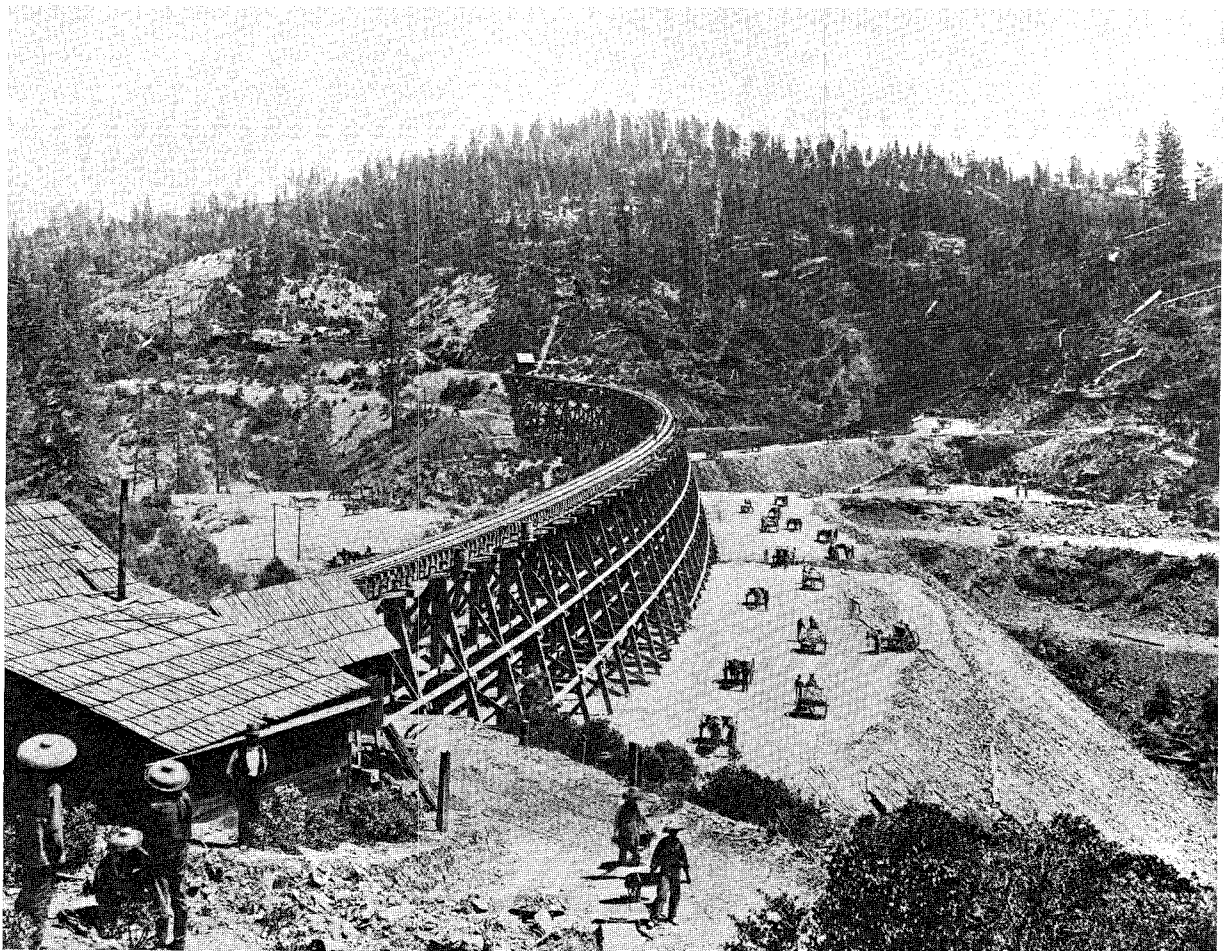
On the issue of Chinese laborers the editors also adopted a new position. Despite former ambivalence, the paper now totally supported the immigration of Chinese laborers. As long as the trade treaties with China allowed an "influx of Asiatic laborers," such labor was "much needed to assist in reclaiming this continent from its wild state." The *Union's* earlier fear that the Chinese intended to colonize and compete for the permanent possession of California was now labeled "utterly vain." The *Union* claimed that any urban unemployment among whites in California stemmed





*Union editors recommended hiring Chinese laborers at menial wages for the important tasks of reclaiming the Delta lands and nursing infant vineyards.*

*Chinese laborers, the Union urged, could "reclaim the continent from its wild state," including impressive undertakings such as the Secrettown Trestle completed in 1877.*





*In the early years, Sacramento's capitalists openly admired the Chinese businessmen's thrift and industriousness (far right, Grant Avenue store in San Francisco) and commercial success in a foreign environment (advertisement for shipping via railroad).*

from the loss of a healthy work ethic, unwillingness to work in the mines and fields, and evil urban influences, not competing Chinese labor. The editors believed California could do with twice the present number of Asiatics. In fact, Chinese labor was viewed as a totally positive element that resulted in widened and multiplied forms of labor for whites.<sup>30</sup>

On the subject of engaging socially with the Chinese, the editors contended in the late sixties that social relations were a necessary and acceptable by-product of commercial intercourse. Reversing a position they had taken in 1862, the editors concluded that an "interchange of populations" was simply one of the results of trade to be expected and accepted.<sup>31</sup> Revealing their Republican party moral persuasions, they concluded that efforts aimed at excluding immigrants violated "the natural rights of man as defined by the Declaration of Independence."<sup>32</sup>

Those who teach themselves to hate the Chinese simply because of their different form of civilization and to defame and persecute them here because they are in the minority and without civil rights adequate to their protection, are far from representing the true character of the American people. . . . America is as ready to encourage an interchange of thoughts and philosophy, as of goods with this strange yet interesting race.<sup>33</sup>

The *Union*, of course, did not fail to call to the attention of its readers that it was the Republican party that had finally fulfilled California's fifteen-year dream of a transcontinental railroad which not only linked Californians with the East Coast, but opened up the mythical China trade for merchants all across America. Goods of all varieties could be transported to California by railroad and then carried by steamship to the ports of China. In 1869 the Republican party platform also openly supported the China trade, and Chinese immigration as a by-product. It described the Chinese as "unoffending immigrants" and asserted that America must not allow domestic anti-Chinese agitation to damage that trade.<sup>34</sup>

本公司之火車接裝大埠付至吾坑來往之  
貨者請箱之輕重而回柳數收柳也或付貨  
之人有往柳過先至往柳收柳若干每一整  
限以式件柳為額由大埠付至吾坑每整貨  
收柳即元半出於下如有失漏即回信並  
決不考言凡貴客付貨在需為留心免  
誤本公司貨之船支於告近街馬頭每日晚  
候四點鐘啟行

信務卑溫佛  
滑精卑溫佛  
火車公司  
決紋謹啟

T.H. GOODMAN, GEN'L FREIGHT AGENT, W.P. & C.P.R.R., SACRAMENTO, CAL.  
R.C. JOHNSON, Thorough Constructing F. & Agt., Local Commercial F. & Agt., 415 CALIFORNIA ST., SAN FRANCISCO, CAL.  
M.S. HURD,  
A.N. TOWNE, GEN'L SUP'T. W.P. & C.P.R.R., SACRAMENTO, CAL.

No similar reversals on the Chinese issue were made by the Democratic or Workingmen's party platforms in California. They continued to support anti-Chinese agitation and total exclusion of Chinese laborers regardless of treaties or trade potential. When the state legislature introduced a bill to impose a special tax on the Chinese not unlike the earlier miners' tax, the *Union*, hitherto a warm partisan of such measures, now attacked it as the sort of tactics used in the Middle Ages to persecute Jewish people.<sup>35</sup>

Even before the completion of the railroad, an 1868 *Union* editorial stressed that "political demagogues" agitating against Chinese immigration must not be





allowed to substitute prejudice for reason and endanger the China trade. In 1869 the *Union* queried: "Is it sound business policy . . . to abuse and maltreat the inhabitants of such a good customer for American goods?" The *Union* characterized these agitators on the one hand as hypocrites willing to employ Chinese as domestics in their own homes and on the other as Irishmen and the children of Irishmen, recently themselves the objects of similar attacks, who were not reliable representatives of American public opinion.<sup>36</sup>

Despite America's optimism and efforts to encourage the fabled China trade, the projected commerce failed to materialize. Based on a serious misunderstanding of

conditions in long self-sufficient China, particularly of the ability and interest of the Chinese people in consuming American manufactured goods, the Chinese trade never developed as anticipated by American merchants. Its promise, however, was slow to fade, and *Union* articles continued to warn that anti-Chinese agitators would jeopardize the China trade. But in the decade of the seventies, other issues replaced the primacy of the Pacific trade in the minds of *Union* editors as they continued to seek an answer to the "Chinese question."

In the 1860's and 1870's California's workingmen began to organize actively against the "capitalists," and



*Increasingly resentful of "competition" with Chinese labor, Sacramento's white cigarmakers issued a "white label" in 1879 to protest the employment of Chinese in the industry.*



strikes demanding higher wages and shorter working hours were not uncommon in the cities like Sacramento and San Francisco. Although these activities paralleled events on the East Coast, the labor movement in California developed a distinctive feature: it became allied with the anti-Chinese movement. Concluding that its goals could never be realized amid the presence of Chinese "cheap labor," organized labor joined forces with the anti-Chinese agitators. It has, in fact, been concluded that Orientals contributed more than any other factor to the strength of the labor movement in California. Certainly no group supporting the restriction of Chinese immigration became more conspicuous than organized labor.<sup>37</sup>

The editors of the *Sacramento Union* opposed the labor movement on two distinct levels. First, they rejected on philosophic grounds labor's nationwide attack on America's capitalist system. As early as 1867 the *Union* voiced strong disapproval of labor movement demands in the East for an eight-hour work day, concluding that if laborers were not satisfied with their ten-hour jobs, thousands of willing workers could be found to take their places. The 1876 platform of the National Labor Convention in Pittsburg was summarily denounced by the *Union* as an irrational document drafted by "raving lunatics." Hypocritical were the workingmen's demands, claimed the *Union*. If Chinese "cheap labor" appealed to the capitalists' desired to obtain the most at the least cost and effort, this same motive was at the bottom of labor's demand for an eight-hour law.<sup>38</sup>

The *Union's* position on labor was clearly stated in an 1878 editorial which proclaimed the interests of capital and labor in an unregulated economy as identical: "The workingman of today is the capitalist of tomorrow." Labor movement agitators promoted "imaginary rights" which "neither workingmen nor any other men possess," and "demands that the government shall provide work for everybody" were "monstrous rubbish." The *Union* further suggested that the only "right" of workingmen was to quit their jobs if they were dissatisfied and that as long as the U.S. maintained treaties with China, the Chinese had as much right as anybody else to earn a living in this "free country."<sup>39</sup> The editors' philosophy rang distinctly conservative. Seeking to preserve the rural and entrepreneurial way of life to which they attributed America's past greatness and her future promise, they blamed urbanization for destroying the independent frontier spirit and creating unemployment. If any group need be held responsible for these regrettable and un-American shifts, the blame belonged to recent European immigrants, such as the Irish. According to the *Union*, four-fifths of the workingmen agitating in Sacramento and San Francisco against the Chinese were Irishmen who ought not desire to compete for the menial jobs held by the Chinese. They ought instead, suggested one editorial, abandon the miseries of urban life to the inferior Chinese and set themselves up on a parcel of California's abundant land as proud and independent farmers.<sup>40</sup>

Opposing the way in which organized labor used the Chinese issue for "partisan" purposes, *Union* editors



repeatedly sought to demonstrate the lack of natural economic connection between the complaints of workmen and the presence of Chinese laborers in California. Focusing on Sacramento they noted, for example, that although there was a substantial history of labor organizing in the town, their workmen had maintained a more conservative and rational perspective than their San Francisco counterparts.<sup>41</sup> Sacramentans proved this conservatism in November of 1877 when their delegates to the Workingmen's Convention in San Francisco withdrew in protest to the dictatorship of Denis Kearney, the young Irishman whose sandlot speeches had been inciting San Francisco workmen to riot against local Chinese. Later, Sacramento members charged the Workingmen's party with bribery and corruption and adopted a resolution that Kearney be removed from leadership.<sup>42</sup> Workingmen's party candidates in Sacramento, who played down the anti-capital charges of the more radical Kearneyites, were victorious in Sacramento's municipal elections that year, as was the party throughout the state,<sup>43</sup> but after the 1878 victories, the Workingmen's party lost momentum, and by 1880 it was unable to win elections in Sacramento or elsewhere.

Although the *Union* editors claimed in 1867 that "the workmen of Sacramento, as a body, could not be enlisted in the anti-Chinese movement," evidence counter to this conclusion is readily apparent. In April, 1876, 4,000 Sacramentans, mostly workmen, turned out for an anti-Chinese meeting, and Sacramento's Order of Caucasians, a group dedicated to excluding Chinese labor and promoting white labor, was also active in that year. In protest to the use of Chinese laborers in the cigar industry, Sacramento's cigar makers created a special "white label" to catch public attention at the 1879 State Fair.<sup>44</sup>

The *Union*, arguing that California workers need not fear the Chinese presence, countered claims by white workmen that California was no longer a workers'

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*Union editors were convinced  
that San Franciscans preferred to loaf  
and starve rather than to work and earn  
an honest living.*

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paradise and argued that Sacramento, at least, was not suffering the lingering effects of the economic depression of 1873. In the *Union*'s January 1, 1878, summation of the preceding year, the editors reasoned that the "contraction of business and consequent stringency of the times" was felt less in Sacramento than in any other section of the state because Sacramento's prosperity was founded in "enduring causes and future permanence." If San Francisco or other California cities were economically depressed, it was the result of the attitude of workmen. *Union* editors were convinced that contemporary San Franciscans preferred to loaf and starve rather than work to earn an honest living. Infected with "communism," these workmen expected to be supported without working, and, furthermore, they seemed bent upon dragging society down to their level. For example, the *Union* reported, when Sacramento's Charles Crocker beneficently created a thousand jobs for California's unemployed on the Southern Pacific Railroad, San Francisco workmen refused to accept the jobs. San Francisco workmen were a special radical breed, the editors were convinced, who did not represent the majority of workmen.<sup>45</sup>

The Chinese issue, according to the *Union*, hurt the causes of the labor movement, and the actions of riotous workmen in San Francisco damaged the reputation of the working classes everywhere. On July 26, 1877, when 10,000 San Franciscans shouting "death to capitalists" assaulted Chinese people with clubs, set fires in Chinatown, and attacked railroad authorities, workmen were engaging not in legitimate strikes, but in race



*The crossing of the rugged Sierra Nevada  
and completing of the transcontinental  
railroad by Chinese railroad workers  
heralded the opening of the fabled China trade  
—a dream which never materialized.*

riots which proved that labor unions lacked control over their own disorganized ranks.<sup>46</sup>

Labor unions were also responsible for a general social decline, believed the *Union*. "Hoodlumism" in San Francisco stemmed from labor union regulations which arbitrarily excluded many young men from employment in the mechanical industries and left them free to fill Kearney's ranks.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, workingmen hurt themselves when they initiated strikes that closed factories which employed only a few Chinese. In short, the *Union* argued that the workingmen's anti-Chinese movement would ultimately produce a public reaction not against the Chinese but against white workingmen themselves.

In reality, according to the *Union*, Chinese labor did not compete unfairly with white labor and was actually necessary and beneficial to California's economy, especially in the areas of domestic service, farm labor, laundries, market gardening, and peddling. No direct competition existed between whites and Chinese laborers, because most Chinese worked in unattractive occupations, and more importantly, whites would not and ought not to be satisfied with such employment.<sup>48</sup>

Throughout the seventies, then, *Union* editors maintained a policy, formulated as early as 1868, that workingmen were falsely agitating against Chinese laborers. Conditions in Sacramento proved that there was no economic basis for the Chinese threat to white laboring men and, as a corollary, that there was no need for organized labor anywhere in California.

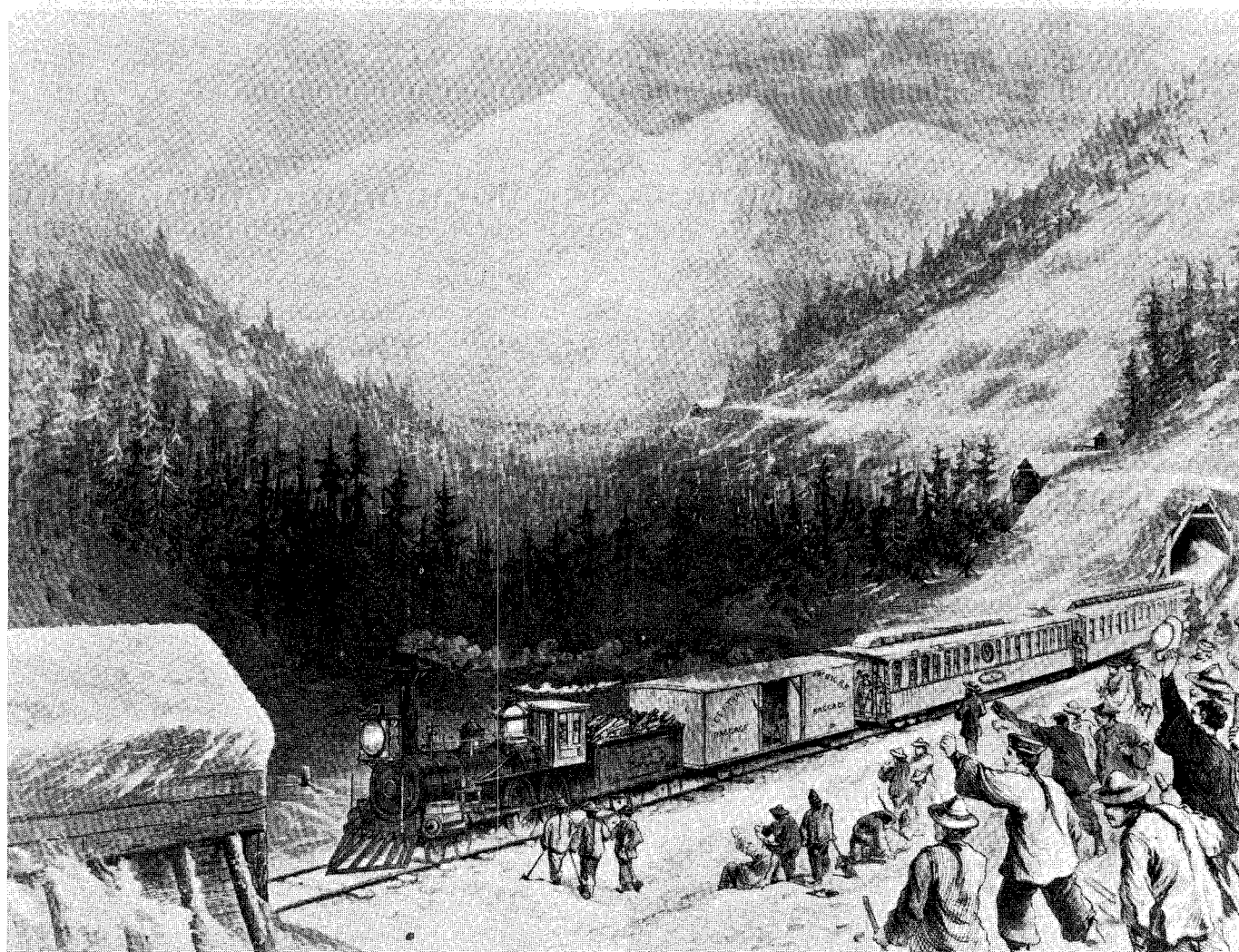
**A**lthough the editors of the *Union* had stated in 1869 that it was only a few "political demagogues, who either see now, or apprehend in the future, any damage from Asiatic immigration," by the late 1870's the newspapermen had joined the majority of Californians who had become convinced of the need to exclude the Chinese

from California.<sup>49</sup> Having rejected the economic arguments of white labor organizers who urged exclusion of the Chinese, what was the basis of the *Union*'s growing opposition to Chinese immigration in the late seventies?

On the question of social interaction with the Chinese and the effects of Chinese culture in California,<sup>50</sup> the *Union* had vacillated during the 1850's and early 1860's. The paper had praised, been amused by, or tolerated many aspects of Chinese culture during the early years, for example, their lavish rituals, fine clothing and silks, and excellent cuisine.<sup>51</sup> The first amateur theatricals in Sacramento were credited to local Chinese people who in 1855 set up a puppet theatre seating 100 people in the back of a gambling establishment on I Street. Although the dialogue was in Chinese, whites also patronized the performances.<sup>52</sup> Whites were impressed by traditional Chinese celebrations—especially displays of fireworks—and the *Union* favorably reported such proceedings.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, the *Union* sometimes referred to the "Celestials" as a "nation of imbeciles," as "immoral" and a "nuisance," and as an "inferior race" with whom "superior" whites ought not to mingle.<sup>54</sup> Although the prospects of the China trade in the late sixties aroused considerable support for cultural interaction, the *Union* even concluding in 1869 that "unerring statistics show that they are on the average nearly twice as moral as the whites,"<sup>55</sup> in the next decade *Union* editors began to focus negatively on cultural interaction between whites and Chinese.

In an unprecedentedly lengthy article in January, 1873, titled "Le Quartier Chinois," the *Union* described positively the Chinese way of life in Sacramento, including Chinese business and culture. The Chinese quarter was situated near the river between G and L and Second and Sixth streets, and I Street, Chinatown's main street, housed many Chinese vegetable dealers, drug stores, pastry shops, carpenters, and cobblers. Fifty-five Chinese wash-houses, according to the *Union*,





employed 300 men, and, like most Chinese businesses, they were regulated by a cooperative guild, an institution transferred from China, that fixed prices and divided profits among members. Chinese physicians treated their sick, and the community supplied every necessary service to its own.<sup>56</sup>

The *Union* praised these economic pursuits and openly admired Chinese businessmen for their excellent craftsmanship, thrift, and industriousness. The successful and growing Chinese shoe business in Sacramento, for example, stemmed from the merchants' "sterling integrity and word [which] is as good as their bond." Large numbers of Chinese moved into agriculture in the Sacramento Valley after the completion of the transcontinental railroad, and their model vegetable gardens, located in the area between the R Street levee and Sutterville, were cited as testimony to their considerable

agrarian skills. The *Union*, consistent with its capitalist and laissez-faire economic philosophy, openly admired the Chinese' hard work and economic success.<sup>57</sup>

While the *Union's* lengthy article on the Chinese in 1873 had also mentioned colorful but less admired Chinatown business establishments on I Street—opium "dens of infamy" and houses of prostitution—by 1876 the *Union* reported with concern that as many as sixteen opium dens operated in Sacramento on I Street between Second and Third. *Union* reporters investigating the scene in this later article concluded that nearly all Chinese smoked opium and that "scores and scores of unemployed Chinese in the city at all times" passed their time smoking the substance. Chinese working in the city or outlying areas congregated on I Street in the evenings where they were entertained at gambling establishments, and by 1876 the *Union* reported sixteen





*In the 1850's and early 1860's the Union editors had tolerated and even enjoyed Chinese cultural life. Theater productions featuring elaborately costumed actors (above, photo c.1890) and restaurants serving unfamiliar but delicious fare (left) were patronized by Caucasian Californians.*





or eighteen daily Chinese lotteries in the quarter whose "thriving business" was aided by corrupted white men and women who also purchased lottery tickets.<sup>58</sup>

By the late seventies *Union* editorials concentrated exclusively on these vices which, they concluded, exercised an immoral influence on local white boys. Chinese prostitution was characterized as traffic in human life no different from the slave trade. For the benefit of readers in the eastern United States in the centennial year, the *Union* reported that "no other foreign nationality supplies so large a percentage of criminals in California as the Chinese." Voicing another popular criticism, the *Union* determined the Chinese to be "pagans" who could never be converted to Christianity and would therefore never have an emotional or spiritual commitment to the goals of white society.<sup>59</sup>

By the late seventies and early eighties, the *Union* evidenced no doubts about the negative effects of Chinese social and cultural influence in California. An 1881 statement concluded, for example, that Chinese "colonies" within American communities were "disgraceful to American civilization" and that they "enabled the Chinese to carry on a government of their own . . . maintaining slavery, upholding a barbarous code." The Chinese presence threatened not America's economy, as labor organizers argued, but American civilization itself. Unabashedly racist, the *Union* urged that cultural assimilation of the Chinese could simply never occur since "this is emphatically a white man's country, and a white man's government . . . [and] the Chinaman is not and cannot be a white man. . . ." But although the non-assimilation issue became the public basis for the *Union* editors finally adopting a policy supporting Chinese exclusion, more important political considerations were behind the *Union's* search for a legitimate justification for excluding the Chinese from California.<sup>60</sup>

In 1875 the Democratic party overwhelmingly defeated Republican candidates in elections throughout the state. The problems in the Republican party in

California were symptomatic of a national crisis in the party in the seventies, typified by the notorious scandals of President Grant's second administration and by the 1876 election in which Republican presidential nominee Hayes found it necessary to bargain his way to victory. The national repudiation of Republicanism was expressed in anti-capital, anti-monopoly, and anti-railroad terms, and Californians injected a hearty anti-Chinese sentiment into the political arena.

Challenged for political survival, the Republican party vigorously sought to regain the support of California voters. By 1880 it had succeeded, with the Republicans carrying state elections by a large majority.<sup>61</sup> Several harsh political lessons of the seventies, however, had influenced the character of this Republican revival and not incidentally brought the *Union* to a new position on the nagging "Chinese question."

In the early 1870's, the editors of the *Union* and their Republican supporters had attempted to mitigate some of the Republican and capitalist excesses that had alienated so many voters. In 1873, Republican governor Newton Booth, with the wholehearted support of the *Union*, led an energetic statewide reform movement under the name of the Independent party. This new coalition of concerned citizens, both Republicans and Democrats, represented an effort to oust the corrupt pro-railway leadership of the Republican party machinery in California which, the *Union* openly admitted, had turned the Republican party into a "private railway corporation." In part the *Union's* attack on the railroad reflected statewide disillusionment with the transcontinental railroad which brought on a series of economic recessions instead of the promised prosperity to California. It was not surprising, therefore, that this *Union*-sponsored Independent party received tremen-

*The "foreignness" of Chinese ghetto life came increasingly under attack by white workingmen -- even the toy peddler who captivated the young girls in Arnold Genthe's c.1890 photograph of San Francisco Chinatown.*

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*The Republican party began to advertise that it was the only party which could deliver an exclusion solution to the Chinese problem.*

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dous popular support and that enough of its candidates won their state legislative elections in 1873 to control that body.<sup>62</sup>

Ironically, this great political victory spelled the end for the trio of editors who had controlled the newspaper since 1853. The Independent movement had naturally engendered considerable hostility among the railroad owners under attack. Collis P. Huntington, for instance, lamented to Mark Hopkins that national newspapers were picking up state newspaper stories on California's anti-railroad movement. Huntington's correspondence also reflects his anger and bitterness at the press in general, but at the *Union* in particular as the recognized leader of California's anti-railroad forces. Eventually, Huntington insisted that the railroads had to "put a lid on" the press. While there are conflicting interpretations as to how instrumental Huntington was in forcing the sale of the *Union*, it is certain that the trio of Anthony and Company sold their highly successful paper in 1875 at less than top price (\$200,000 each "in dividends") and that the *Union* was immediately merged with the *Record*, a Sacramento daily owned since 1867 by the Big Four railroadmen. This development, of course, explains the sudden reversal in the coverage afforded the railroads in the post-merger *Union* columns.<sup>63</sup>

By late 1875 *Record-Union* editorials again defended the actions of the Central Pacific Railroad on a variety of heated issues. For example, when workingmen charged that the railroad preferentially hired Chinese

laborers before whites, the *Union* maintained that the railroad was forced to use the Chinese because no whites applied for the jobs. In 1876 when Governor Stanford stated that railroad corporations ought not to be regulated, the *Union* applauded, giving the following reasons: First, laws restricting corporations had no legal justification; secondly, such regulatory legislation was never successful anyway; thirdly, the intimate relationship between capital and the citizen should not be tampered with; and finally, injustice to corporations would never help the laborer. The statewide Democratic victories in 1875, however, testified to the inadequacy of the Republican party's self-reform efforts, including the Independent party, and to the failure of the Central Pacific's attempts to stifle or buy out the press.<sup>64</sup>

In the late seventies, in-fighting among Republicans, as represented by the Independent party, suddenly halted. Businessmen united to face their fiercest opponents, labor radicals. The power wielded by Kearney's Workingmen's party at the California Constitutional Convention in 1878 provided solid evidence of the serious challenge being raised to Republicanism and capitalism itself. For example, the Kearneyites at the convention insured that a large number of anti-Chinese measures were adopted as part of the state's new constitution (they were all later declared unconstitutional by the federal courts). The *Union*, along with railroad interests, banks, and Sacramento's business community, bitterly opposed this constitution so largely framed by workingmen, but found themselves disturbingly powerless against the workingmen's forces.<sup>65</sup>

Although the old *Union* had consistently criticized workingmen "demagogues" for politically exploiting the Chinese issue, the radicals had made it such a central issue in the state that the paper now adopted a similar survival tactic. When the Republican party began to advertise that it was the only party that could deliver an exclusion solution to the Chinese problem in Cali-





fornia, the *Union* pointed out to its readers that the only legal means to secure exclusion was modification by the federal government of the existing Burlingame Treaty and trade agreement which permitted immigration of Chinese laborers. It was necessary, therefore, to convince the rest of the nation of the seriousness of California's problem with the Chinese.<sup>66</sup>

Toward this end, the *Union* editors' strategy was consistent with their long-standing conservatism and their Republican party emphasis on law and order. Promoting legal procedures as the only means by which to achieve the goal of exclusion, *Union* columns attempted to convince Californians that anti-Chinese agitation would only hinder efforts to persuade easterners that Californians were not motivated to exclude the

Chinese by "vulgar race prejudice," but by the "legitimate" reason of cultural non-assimilation. Accordingly, *Union* editorials supported the formation of state and national congressional investigative committees to study the question. These committee hearings, held in 1876, 1877, and 1878, successfully aroused anti-Chinese sentiments in a national audience, and discussion usually centered on "immoral" social habits and "vices" attributed to the Chinese. The *Union* also called for a vote in California on the question of Chinese immigration—a measure taken in 1880 which predictably proved overwhelming support for exclusion—as another method of alerting national lawmakers to popular sentiment. It is interesting to note that the *Union* observed that California capitalists who favored immi-



gration for legitimate economic reasons had generously made no effort to compromise the clear-cut election results.<sup>67</sup>

Although the Republican party regained power in 1880, and although it promoted moderate measures to secure exclusion, the "Chinese problem" grew ever more serious. Increased violence against the Chinese erupted throughout the state in such places as Los Angeles, Rocklin, Grass Valley, Martinez, and San Francisco.<sup>68</sup>

In response, *Union* editors insisted that "incendiary appeals" of Kearneyite "demagogues and blatherskites" would only prove counterproductive to their efforts to win easterners to their cause. They also condemned the workingmen's "fierce, wild-beast" actions as insidiously directed against the laws of the United States, against the hearts and homes, wives and children of all Americans. Having made this political distinction between good and bad, moral and immoral, the *Union* editors bragged that only "Republicans represent[ed] the principles of law and order and civilized progress. . . ."<sup>69</sup>

When the U.S. Congress finally acted in 1878 and passed legislation excluding the Chinese, Republican President Hayes vetoed the measure because of the eastern commercial community's fears that it would interfere with the Asia trade. Believing by this time that treaty modifications could have no effect on United States-China foreign relations or United States commercial interests in China, *Union* editors were disappointed with the president's veto, but they remained hopeful because Hayes' veto message was sympathetic, and his differences with California appeared to be ones of means, not ends. *Union* editors, therefore, cautioned Californians to view the veto as a temporary setback and urged them to persevere in their "missionary work" of educating ignorant easterners who seemed to be concerned only with "this 'brotherhood of man' business."<sup>70</sup>

Between 1879 and 1882 when the exclusion act was finally passed, the California legislature responded to continuing public clamor and passed many pieces of anti-Chinese legislation, all of which were later declared unconstitutional. The laws, however, embodied California's frustration with the lack of action in Washington and the belief that matters must be taken into its own hands. Throughout this period the *Union* maintained that only the federal government could legislate relief on this issue and that these state legislative attempts exemplified the ignorance and waste of public money which had always characterized Kearneyite and workingmen politicians.<sup>71</sup>

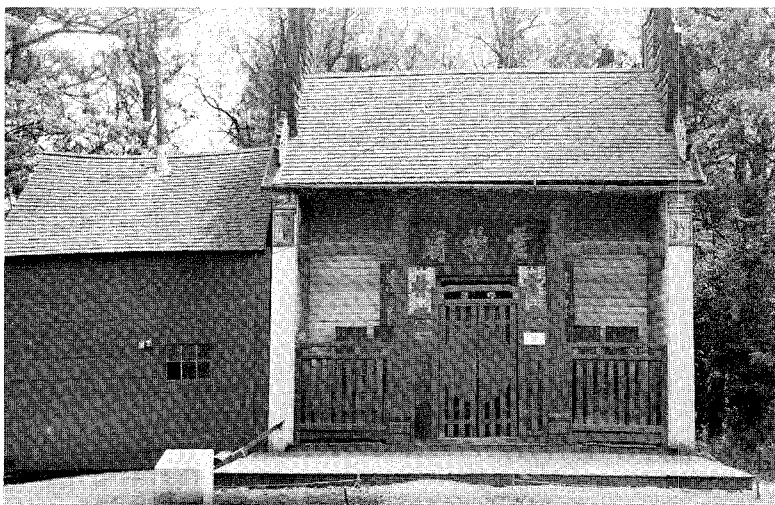
Continued pressure from California produced new exclusion legislation in 1881 that passed the United States Congress and was sent to President Arthur for signature. California Governor Perkins declared a legal holiday on March 6 so that mass demonstrations might be held to impress the East Coast with the state's overwhelming support of the legislation. *Union* editors again were optimistic about passage, but in early April of 1882, President Arthur vetoed the bill, objecting that the proposed twenty-year exclusion provision was against the spirit of treaties with China. He suggested, however, that he would sign amended legislation reducing the exclusion period to five or ten years.<sup>72</sup>

President Arthur's veto was enough to cause some frustrated California Republicans to desert to the Democratic party. Staunchly in the Republican fold, the *Union* interpreted these Republican desertions to the Democratic camp as a "repudiation of those [Republicans] who have labored most assiduously for the passage of the Chinese bill." Although somewhat shaken by the veto, the *Union* insisted that the Democrats could never bring in exclusion legislation because a Democratic-sponsored exclusion bill would always be interpreted by easterners as the fruit of irrational race prejudice such as that which had caused the Civil War.<sup>73</sup>

As amended legislation neared passage later that same



Traditional queues and dress and the “pagan” ceremonies in joss houses (photograph of Weaverville house built in 1879, below) came to symbolize the Chinese immigrants’ disinterest in assimilating into Anglo American culture.



April, the *Union* charged that California Democrats were trying to prevent passage of the legislation in order not to lose the issue that had gained them so much support over the years. On the other hand, Republicans speaking through the *Union* sought to remove the issue from the political arena to a higher level of historical importance. Reflected the *Union*:

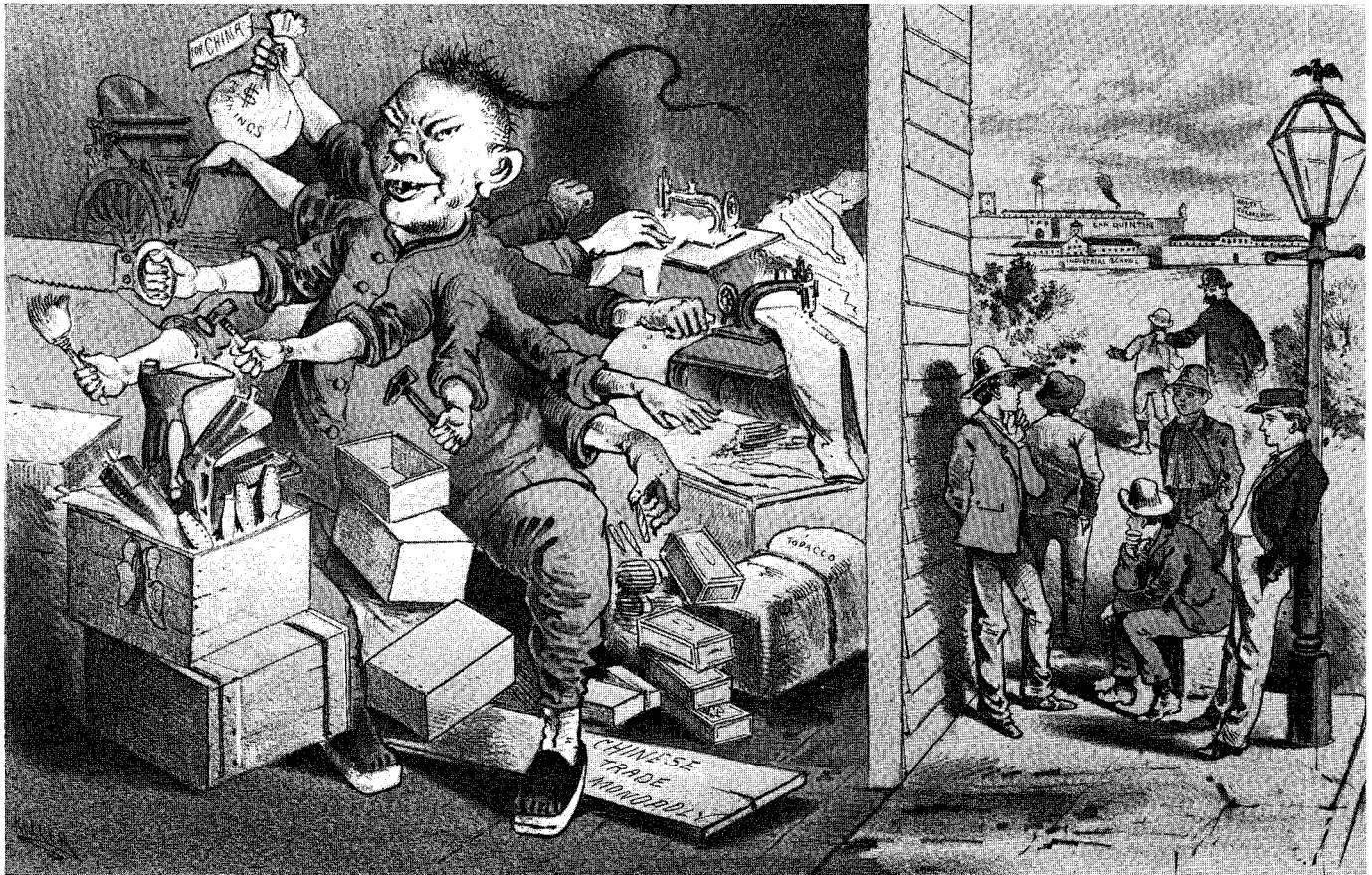
We have become engaged in a contest which we cannot . . . abandon, and however tedious the struggle may be, we are compelled to go on with it, simply because it is a question of life or death to Anglo-Saxon civilization in the Pacific States.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, on May 8, 1882, President Arthur signed an amended bill which established a ten-year period of exclusion. In the years leading to the event the issue had been taken far beyond the reality of Chinese immigration and exploited for political purposes by Democrats, Republicans, and the Workingmen’s party. This truth was no better demonstrated than in the *Union*’s victorious editorial on May 9, a statement which barely mentioned the Chinese. Using the occasion to state again that if the bill had failed to pass, the blame would have been with the Democrats and Republican deserters, they congratulated the great Republican party as the only party that could have delivered exclusion legislation for California.<sup>75</sup>

That the powerful Central Pacific railroad monopoly found it necessary to maneuver the end of a great and once supportive California newspaper testifies to the success and influence of Anthony and Company’s *Sacramento Union*. After the forced sale and merger in 1875, Anthony, Larkin, and Morrill were all well advanced in years and, according to accounts, not willing to begin another newspaper or engage in other businesses. In fact, each had little time left. Anthony died a



Unemployment and fear of competition with Chinese labor sparked this Wasp cartoon in which the "Chinese trade monopoly" resulted in unemployed youths being imprisoned in San Quentin.



year later on January 6, 1876, and Larkin followed him by only a few months. Morrill, 63 years old and probably the youngest of the three, received an appointment as surveyor of customs in the port of San Francisco from Governor Newton Booth, a long-time friend of the *Union*. He died in 1880. Under the three men's leadership the *Union* was best remembered as the great friend of the Republican and Northern cause during the Civil War, as the greatest advocate in the state of construction of the transcontinental railroad, and as a good Republican paper capable of an independent political stand, such as in the anti-railroad monopoly movement in 1873.<sup>76</sup>

During the tenure of Anthony and Company the *Union* appears to have had no conflicts of interest based on financial investments outside the paper or on political party obligations that might have interfered with their editorial stands on the "Chinese question." After 1875, however, the paper was different. Thereafter, this newspaper's uncritical affection for the railroad was demonstrated under the partisan management of William Mills. In fact, Mills left the *Union* in 1883 to become land agent for the Southern Pacific Railroad. In 1889 his position in the company was elevated, and he became land agent for another branch of the monopoly and director and vice-president of the Central Pacific,



*The success of the Workingmen's Party of California ticket at the state constitutional convention in 1878 forced the Republican party to compete to deliver full exclusion to state voters.*

managing large land disposals in the San Joaquin Valley.<sup>77</sup>

For thirty years the *Union* unflinchingly supported the presence and economic contributions of Chinese laborers in California. The Foreign Miners' Tax, paid largely by the Chinese, had provided essential revenue for the operation of state and county governments. When the potential of the China trade loomed large, the *Union* vigorously supported Chinese immigration. The editors admired the industrious, thrifty, and successful Chinese businessmen in Sacramento and refuted organized labor's claims that the Chinese competed unfairly with white workers. The editors steadfastly defended the presence of Chinese labor because it promoted the interests of businessmen and capitalists.


Social and political factors, however, continually rendered the *Union's* position on the "Chinese question" ambivalent. The editors' eventual adoption of cultural non-assimilation as the rationale for exclusion was consistent with their long-standing aversion to social and cultural contact with Chinese immigrants.

The political chaos of the seventies produced serious criticisms of California Republicanism and caused the *Union* to assert a new and active political role in solution of the "Chinese question." Its "law and order" line contributed to the conservative character of the Republican exclusion campaign. The *Union's* boast that only the Republican party could achieve the necessary federal exclusion solution made for effective political rhetoric in 1882 when the federal government finally handed down the decision, but it insufficiently credited the decades-old anti-Chinese movement in California.

The opinions of Sacramento's *Union* editors represented a significant and influential element of California society and politics during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. To a greater degree than heretofore investigated by historians, their ideas appear to have shaped California's reaction to Chinese immigration.

As a footnote, anti-Chinese agitation in California, of course, did not cease with the passage of the federal

REGULAR WORKINGMEN'S TICKET, CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO.



For

1. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, PAUL BONNET.
2. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, ANTHONY FISCHER.
3. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, J. W. JAMISON.
4. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JAMES KIDNEY.
5. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, J. R. PICO.
6. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JOHN R. SHARPSTEIN.
7. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, CHARLES TILLSON.
8. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JOHN A. WHELAN.
9. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, P. S. DORNEY.
10. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, J. B. KELLY.
11. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, H. P. WILLIAMS.
12. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, L. L. MCKILNEY.
13. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JOHN GREENWELL.
14. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, L. J. MORROW.
15. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, G. THOM.
16. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, J. M. TOLD.
17. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, W. F. STONE.
18. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, W. H. NORTHCUTT.
19. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, D. M. GLOSTER.
20. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JOHN C. CRIGLER.
21. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, J. C. GARBER.
22. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, H. A. BOYLE.
23. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, JONAS SPECT.
24. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, W. M. THORP.
25. DELEGATE AT LARGE TO CONST'L CONVENTION, ISAAC BICKNELL.

exclusion act in 1882. Discrimination and acts of violence against the Chinese laborers remaining in California became more intense as the years passed. The exclusion "solution" to the "Chinese question," furthermore, served as the model for California's treatment of later immigrant groups, such as the Japanese who began arriving in California in the 1880's and 1890's, ironically, to fill the labor void created by the excluded Chinese.

*The photographs on pages 12, 15 (bottom), and 18, and the March 3, 1882, Wasp cartoon on page 28, are courtesy The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. The photograph on page 15 (top) is from the Title Insurance and Trust Collection, CHS Library; on pages 16, 17, 22, 25, and 27 (bottom), from the CHS Library; on pages 18 and 29, from the California State Library, Sacramento; and on page 27 (top), from the San Francisco Maritime Museum. The drawing reproduced on page 21 is taken from [Edward] Vischer's Pictorial of California Landscape (San Francisco, 1870).*



## Notes

1. Elmer Clarence Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1939), p. 11; B. M. Ziegler, ed., *Immigration: An American Dilemma* (1953), p. 82.
2. Mary Roberts Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1909), pp. 425, 503; John T. C. Fang, *Yee Fow: The Chinese Community in Sacramento* (Chinese Publishing House, 1961), p. 28.
3. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement*, 30; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 83.
4. Edward C. Kemble, *A History of California Newspapers, 1846-1858* (Sacramento: *Daily Union*, 1858), pp. 90, 94, 114-16, 122, 126.
5. Sacramento County Historical Society, *Golden Notes*, October 1964, p. 11, 16-23.
6. Thor Severson, *Sacramento; An Illustrated History, 1839 to 1874* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1973), pp. 125-26; Kemble, *California Newspapers*, 148-150; Ella Sterling Cummins, *The Story of the Files; A Review of California Writers and Literature* (San Francisco: World's Fair Commission of California, 1893), pp. 77-93; *Sacramento Union*, March 11, 1859, p. 1.
7. *Sacramento Bee*, *Sacramento County and Its Resources: A Souvenir of the Bee* (Sacramento: 1894), p. 153.
8. Cummins, *Story of the Files*, 77.
9. Kemble, *California Newspapers*, 147-49; *Union*, March 19, 1851.
10. *Union*, May 30, 1851, p. 2; June 7, 1852, p. 2; Winfield J. Davis, *History of Political Conventions in California, 1849-1892* (Sacramento: California State Library, 1893), *passim*.
11. *Union*, March 27, 1854, p. 2; June 9, 1856, p. 2; April 24, 1854, p. 2.
12. *Union*, August 8, 1854, p. 2; June 24, 1854, p. 2; August 9, 1854, p. 2.
13. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 38.
14. See, for example, *Union*, April 15, 1859, p. 1; March 3, 1859, p. 2; Feb. 26, 1859, p. 2; April 25, 1855, p. 2; Jan. 5, 1858, p. 2; April 7, 1858, p. 1; March 3, 1858, p. 2.
15. "A Gold Rush Letter from A. C. Edwards," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 43 (Sept., 1964): 248.
16. *Union*, Feb. 5, 1859, p. 2; Feb. 10, 1859, p. 4.
17. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 29-54.
18. *Ibid.*, 36.
19. *Union*, March 6, 1858, p. 2; Jan. 26, 1859, p. 2.
20. Stephen Williams, *The Chinese in the California Mines, 1848-1860* (San Francisco: R&E Research Associates, 1971, originally published 1930), p. 69; *Union*, August 2, 1860, p. 2; March 10, 1856, p. 2; May 30, 1856, p. 2.
21. *Union*, April 9, 1858, p. 2; June 15, 1858, p. 2.
22. *Union*, May 30, 1856, p. 2.
23. *Union*, April 7, 1858, p. 2.
24. *Union*, March 6, 1858, p. 2; March 8, 1858, p. 2; March 10, 1858, p. 3.
25. *Union*, Jan. 1, 1862, p. 4; George Chu, "Chinatowns in the Delta: The Chinese in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, 1870-1960," *California Historical Society Quarterly*, 49 (March 1970): 21-37; *Union*, Jan. 17, 1862, p. 2; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 33-34; *Union*, Feb. 19, 1862, p. 3.
26. Ira Cross, *A History of the Labor Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1935), pp. 28-31.
27. Edwin L. Sabin, *Building the Pacific Railway* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 30., 1919), *passim*.
28. *Ibid.*, 228; *Union*, June 28, 1869, p. 2; March 5, 1868, p. 2.
29. *Union*, March 26, 1857, p. 2; March 9, 1867, p. 2.
30. *Union*, March 5, 1868, p. 2; March 5, 1868, p. 2; June 2, 1869, p. 4.
31. *Union*, March 5, 1868, p. 2.
32. *Union*, Jan. 11, 1869, p. 2.
33. *Union*, May 1, 1868, p. 2.
34. Davis, *Political Conventions*, 293; *Union*, Jan 3, 1867, p. 4.
35. *Union*, Dec. 13, 1869, p. 2.
36. *Union*, March 5, 1868, p. 2; Nov. 27, 1869, p. 8; Feb. 26, 1867, p. 2; Feb. 28, 1879, p. 2.
37. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement*, 40.
38. *Union*, May 3, 1867, p. 2; April 20, 1876, p. 2; August 2, 1877, p. 2.
39. *Union*, Feb. 2, 1878, p. 2; July 25, 1877, p. 2.
40. *Union*, Feb. 26, 1867, p. 2.
41. In the early 1850's Sacramento's printers, bricklayers, and hod-carriers formed local unions, but the Civil War forestalled further organizing. By 1867 an Eight-Hour League was formed, and in the same year Sacramento bricklayers went on strike for an eight-hour day, as did Chinese railroad workers in Sacramento County who struck unsuccessfully for higher wages. In March of 1873, the Workingmen's Alliance of the Pacific Coast was created in Sacramento, to be followed in May by a Sacramento chapter of the People's Protective Alliance—a group including workingmen allied to promote anti-Chinese agitation. A chapter of a similar but extremely anti-capitalist group, the Workingmen's Party of the United States, was organized in Sacramento in 1876. See Cross, *History of Labor Movement*, 21, 23, 28, 43, 53, 56, 85, and *passim*.
42. Cross, *History of Labor Movement*, 105-6.
43. Lucille Eaves, *A History of California Labor Legislation* (Berkeley: U. C. Press, 1910), p. 34.
44. *Union*, March 14, 1867, p. 2; April 12, 1876, p. 3; April 24, 1876, p. 3; Cross, *History of Labor Movement*, 138.
45. Alexander P. Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: A Study of the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: U.C. Press, 1967), pp. 187, 194-95, *passim*; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 116; *Union*, Jan. 1, 1878, p. 4; June 18, 1878, p. 2; Feb. 2, 1878,



- p. 2; Jan. 21, 1878, p. 2; July 25, 1877, p. 2.
46. *Union*, July 25, 1877, p. 2; July 25, 1877, p. 2.
47. *Union*, July 26, 1877, p. 2.
48. *Union*, August 2, 1877, p. 2; Feb. 17, 1880, p. 2; May 27, 1881, p. 2.
49. *Union*, June 2, 1869, p. 4.
50. See *Union*, Oct. 24, 1854, p. 2; April 18, 1855, p. 2; May 25, 1855, p. 2; May 10, 1856, p. 2; March 4, 1857, p. 2; Nov. 23, 1858, p. 3; March 8, 1862, p. 2; March 13, 1862, p. 2; Nov. 11, 1869, p. 3; Dec. 10, 1869, p. 2.
51. *Union*, Oct. 1, 1858, p. 1; May 4, 1860, p. 2; Aug. 18, 1856, p. 2.
52. Severson, *Sacramento*, 148.
53. *Union*, Jan. 24, 1857, p. 2.
54. *Union*, Aug. 9, 1854, p. 2; Feb. 25, 1858, p. 4; Feb. 5, 1859, p. 2.
55. *Union*, Nov. 27, 1869, p. 8.
56. *Union*, Jan. 11, 1873. The *Union* article listed the following other Chinese activities in Sacramento in 1873: 25 cigar makers in five factories, 10 retail grocery stores, 3 large grocery wholesalers, 3 interpreters, 1 railroad company agent, 1 pawnbroker, 3 eating houses, 6 lotteries, 1 "joss" house beyond Sutter Lake, 6 drug stores, 70-80 vegetable gardeners, 12 barbers in six shops, 7 doctors, 2 shoe manufacturers, 2 fruit stands, 4 butcher shops and 2 slaughter yards, 1 English school for Chinese held in Congregational Church (average attendance of 20 with "most satisfactory progress"), 125 prostitutes, 150 other businessmen.
57. *Ibid.*
58. *Union*, Feb. 23, 1876, p. 1.
59. *Union*, April 19, 1876, p. 2; April 18, 1876, p. 2; May 2, 1876, p. 2; May 13, 1876, p. 8. In a "Letter to the Editor" one Sacramento clergyman challenged the popular impression that Sacramento's Christian churches were unable to convert the Chinese. He reported that although only eight Chinese had been baptized into the Presbyterian Church, an average of sixty-three Chinese attended Sunday service with a like number attending week-night English language classes. He concluded: "Other churches in the city would give the same testimony." *Union*, May 13, 1876.
60. *Union*, Sept. 20, 1881, p. 2; April 8, 1876, p. 4; Feb. 27, 1878, p. 2; May 2, 1878, p. 2; Jan. 20, 1881, p. 2.
61. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 110-23.
62. Hubert Howe Bancroft, *History of California*, 14:365. See discussion in John W. Caughey, *California; A Remarkable State's Life History* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1970), pp. 320-26; *Union*, Sept. 9, 1873, p. 2; June 12, 1873, p. 2; June 23, 1873, p. 2; June 26, 1873, p. 2, 3. It was ironic that Sacramento, which had been at the forefront of railroad promotion in California, expressed the greatest reaction to the failure of the railroads to meet their promises in California. As the China trade failed to bring expected profits, Sacramentans saw their city becoming only a way station for the Central Pacific on the main line to San Francisco.
63. Cummins, *Story of the Files*, 77-94; Norman E. Tutorow, *Leland Stanford: Man of Many Careers* (Menlo Park, California: Pacific Coast Publishers, 1971), p. 132; Collis P. Huntington and Mark Hopkins Correspondence, Microfilm Collection, University of California, Berkeley, Bancroft Library, Volume 4, Feb. 20, 1873, and August 11, 1873.
64. *Union*, May 10, 1876, p. 2; Jan. 31, 1876, p. 2.
65. Caughey, *California*, 320-26.
66. *Union*, May 5, 1876, p. 2; June 26, 1873, p. 2; Aug. 14, 1871, p. 1.
67. *Union*, Jan. 20, 1881, p. 2; Dec. 22, 1877, p. 4; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 123. See California Senate Documents on exclusion, speeches before California Senate Investigating Committee, 1876 and 1877; and Speeches before U.S. Senate and House of Representatives Investigating Committee, 1878, *Chinese Pamphlets*, Vols. I and II, California State Library, California Collection, Sacramento. Also Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 96-108.
68. *Union*, Oct. 28, 1871, p. 5; May 12, 1876, p. 2; Oct. 17, 1877, p. 2; Oct. 21, 1877, p. 2; Oct. 19, 1877, p. 1; July 9, 1879, p. 2; July 12, 1879, p. 4; April 27, 1882, p. 1; July 13, 1882, p. 2; Dec. 7, 1882, p. 1; Oct. 4, 1882, p. 1; Oct. 5, 1882, p. 3.
69. *Union*, April 3, 1876, p. 2; April 4, 1876, p. 2; Feb. 28, 1879, p. 2; March 18, 1879, p. 4; July 27, 1877, p. 2; Mar. 22, 1880, p. 2; Mar. 4, 1879, p. 2; Aug. 14, 1871, p. 1.
70. William M. Armstrong, "Godkin and Chinese Labor: A Paradox in Nineteenth Century Liberalism," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 1 (January, 1962): 97; *Union*, May 27, 1878, p. 2; March 8, 1879, p. 5; Dec. 6, 1881, p. 2; March 3, 1879, p. 2.
71. *Union*, Feb. 2, 1880, p. 2; Feb. 14, 1880, p. 1; Feb. 12, 1880, p. 4; April 2, 1880, p. 2; April 9, 1880, p. 1; Jan. 10, 1881, p. 1; Jan. 18, 1881, p. 2; Jan. 21, 1881, p. 2; March 23, 1880, p. 2.
72. *Union*, March 3, 1882, p. 2.
73. *Union*, April 7, 1882, p. 2.
74. *Union*, April 10, 1882, p. 2.
75. *Union*, May 9, 1882, p. 2.
76. Cummins, *Story of the Files*, 77-94.
77. Sacramento Bee, *Sacramento County and Its Resources*, 153.

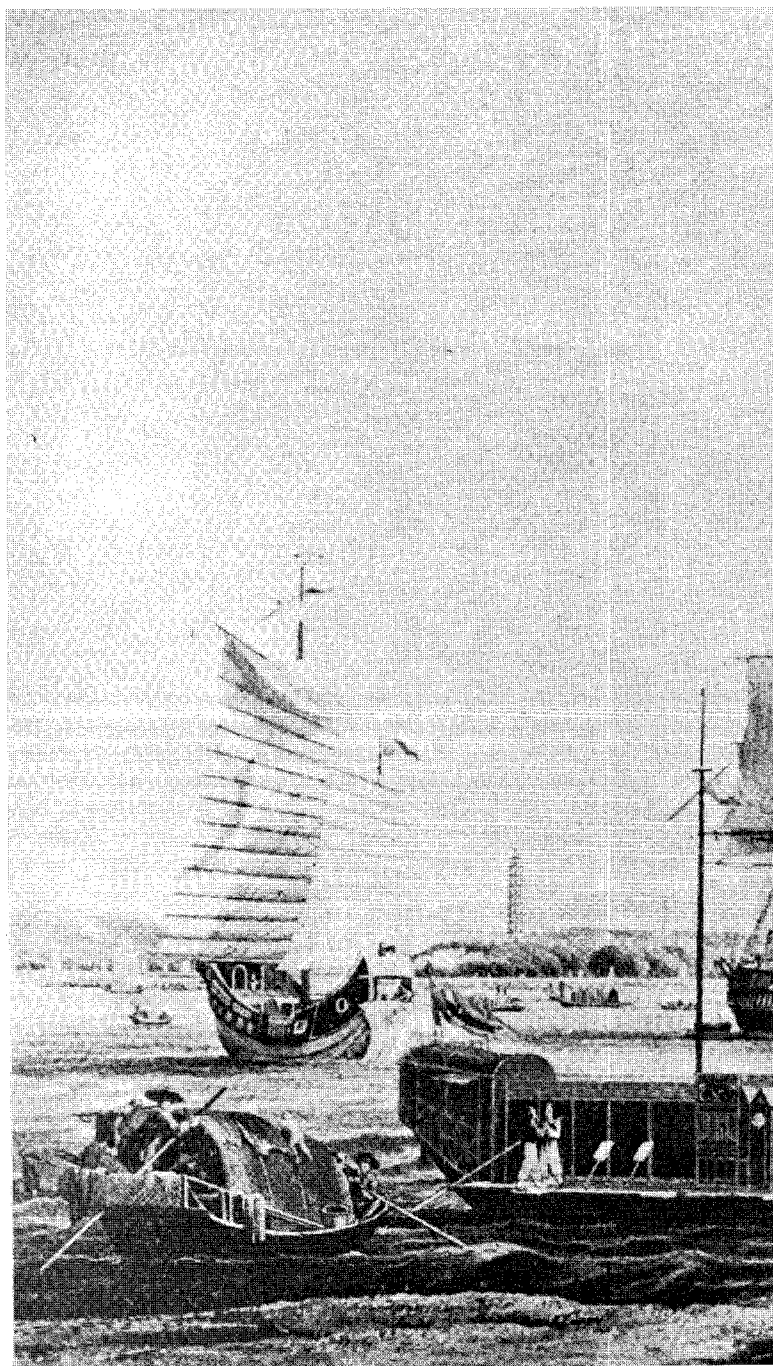


# the diplomacy of discrimination:

"The Chinese must go!" cried angry Pacific Coast workingmen in the 1870's who rioted against the influx of Chinese immigrants to the United States.<sup>1</sup> Although fueled by essentially domestic grievances which had little to do with China itself, their anti-Chinese movement, whose avowed goal was total exclusion of the Chinese from the United States, held serious implications for American-Chinese international relations and Western businessmen and missionaries in China. The eventual resolution between conflicting domestic demands and diplomatic treaty agreements in the 1880's—a solution involving complicated diplomatic and political maneuvers—makes a revealing study of how domestic issues and partisan politics have influenced America's foreign policy.

In 1868 the American diplomat Anson Burlingame, traveling as China's envoy to the nations of the Western world, had negotiated a treaty in Washington, D.C., with then Secretary of State William H. Seward. The resulting Burlingame Treaty had guaranteed free immigration and legal protection to Chinese people in America,<sup>2</sup> proof, it was claimed, of American's friendship for China. The burgeoning domestic movement to exclude Chinese immigrants from the United States, however, clearly violated both the letter and the spirit of the Burlingame Treaty's policy of respect for the Chinese government and Chinese people in America.

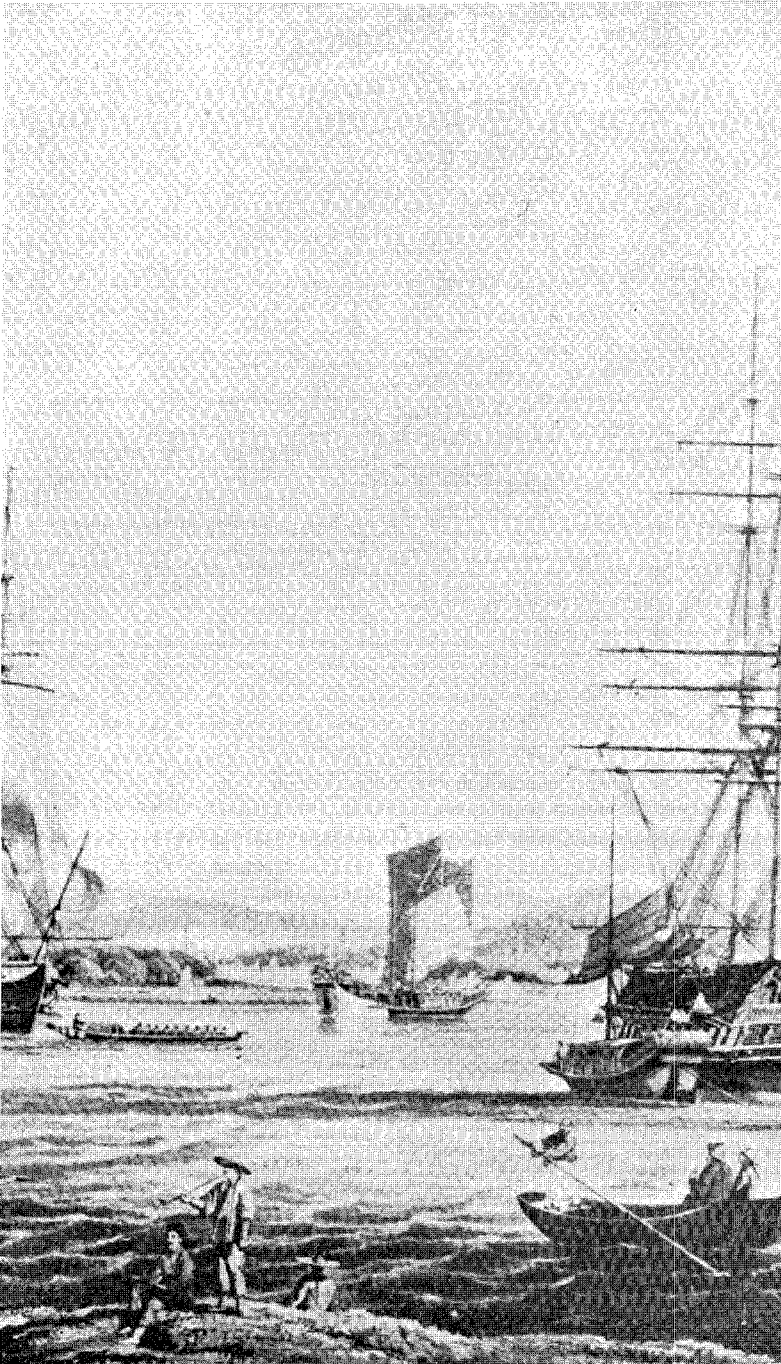
This increasingly violent agitation for exclusion posed a grave threat to America's diplomatic position in China. Any unilateral American restriction of Chinese treaty rights in the United States, which was essentially what exclusionists demanded, could lead to retaliation by China. All of the legal rights and privileges held by Americans and Europeans in China rested on a system of so-called "unequal treaties," which British and French naval power had forced upon China after the Opium



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# Chinese exclusion, 1876-1882



*Sizable foreign enclaves existing in China's major coastal cities made exclusion of the Chinese from America a diplomatically sensitive issue.*

War of 1839-42. These treaties gave to Westerners in China commercial, judicial, and territorial privileges which flagrantly insulted and undermined the sovereignty of the Chinese government. Under the terms of the treaties, China was forbidden to set its own tariffs, to arrest and prosecute foreigners for violations of Chinese laws, and to deny to one Western nation any treaty right or privilege granted to another nation.<sup>3</sup> Geographically and culturally isolated from Europe, the Chinese had agreed to these one-sided treaties not only because of military pressure, but also out of ignorance of Western international law and practices.

As the years passed the Chinese saw how Western diplomats had used the tenets of international law to justify demands for ever-increasing rights and privileges in China. The treaties, for example, had legalized penetration of China by Western merchants and missionaries. By the 1870's sizable foreign enclaves existed in China's major coastal cities, and Western missionaries were busily evangelizing far into the interior of China. After more than three decades of official treaty relations with Western nations, the Chinese had learned enough about Western diplomatic practice not only to be more cautious but also to attempt to turn it to their own use. If the United States prevented Chinese immigration into California, the Chinese government might move to exclude American and European merchants and missionaries from China.

The Chinese citizens who had traveled to the United States with Burlingame in 1868 had been somewhat of a curiosity in the East, but by 1870 the Chinese in America, particularly in the western states, were viewed as the "yellow peril." Their numbers had increased from 35,000 in 1860 to over 105,000 in 1880, with 99 percent of these immigrants concentrated in the Pacific Coast region.<sup>4</sup> Originally, capitalist entrepreneurs had welcomed the Chinese as a cheap labor source, but by the mid-1870's the completion of the transcontinental railroad, the growth of the white labor force in the West,



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*Seward expressed concern that a national anti-Chinese law might threaten the entire Western treaty system in China.*

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and nation-wide economic depression had encouraged white workingmen to turn against Chinese workers. White Californians deeply resented competing with what they considered to be Chinese "slave" labor. Although the Chinese immigrants were not slaves, most did come to the United States as contract laborers who worked for extremely low wages. "Chinamen" were also unacceptable because they were not Caucasian. Many Californians viewed the filth, crime, opium-smoking, and crowded conditions of local Chinatowns as racial stereotypes rather than manifestations of poverty. Economic and racial hysteria, then, helped make Chinese exclusion an urgent political issue in California.<sup>5</sup>

Both the Democratic and Republican parties included a plank on "Mongolian immigration" in their national platforms in 1876, because they were courting California's votes in the upcoming presidential election which they expected to be a close race. The Democrats forthrightly recommended exclusion, and the Republicans proposed that Congress investigate the effects of Chinese immigration. The Republican candidate, Rutherford B. Hayes, avoided the issue throughout the campaign, however, because his party was split on the question. Many northern and eastern Republicans, such as Hannibal Hamlin, Lincoln's first vice-president, opposed exclusion as racially prejudiced and contrary to America's liberal traditions. Republicans from the western states such as California Senator Aaron Sargent, on the other hand, led the fight for restrictive immigration laws.<sup>6</sup>

While Hayes equivocated, Sargent tried to prompt congressional action limiting the influx of Chinese. The Senate and House refused to move quickly but did set up a joint committee to investigate the question. Because of the illness and eventual death of the committee chairman, Oliver P. Morton of Indiana, Sargent headed the investigation. After extensive testimony, more than half of which was favorable to the Chinese and immigration, Sargent submitted a report for the committee which unequivocally recommended exclusion. Senator Morton's notes, published posthumously and based upon the same testimony, concluded that the investigation failed to prove that California had suffered either morally or economically from the presence of the Chinese. In fact, Morton argued, the state had benefited measurably from its Chinese population.<sup>7</sup>

**L**iving in far-off China, George Frederick Seward, United States minister plenipotentiary in Peking and nephew of the former secretary of state, did not in 1876 consider the domestic anti-Chinese movement a serious problem. The number of Chinese emigrating to the United States would never be very large, he predicted, because the Orientals did not want to live in America. They were deterred in part by the hostile reception they received in California, but the primary reason, according to Seward, was that they "shrink from contact with our restless, energetic civilization." Only the lure of money had prompted them to relocate in America, in the minister's view, and "when the call for labor ceases to be an urgent one, the Chinaman will stop his migration in that direction."<sup>8</sup>

The increasing number of anti-Chinese incidents in the United States in early 1876, however, prompted the Tsungli Yamen, or Chinese foreign office, to address Minister Seward on the subject. Copying the language



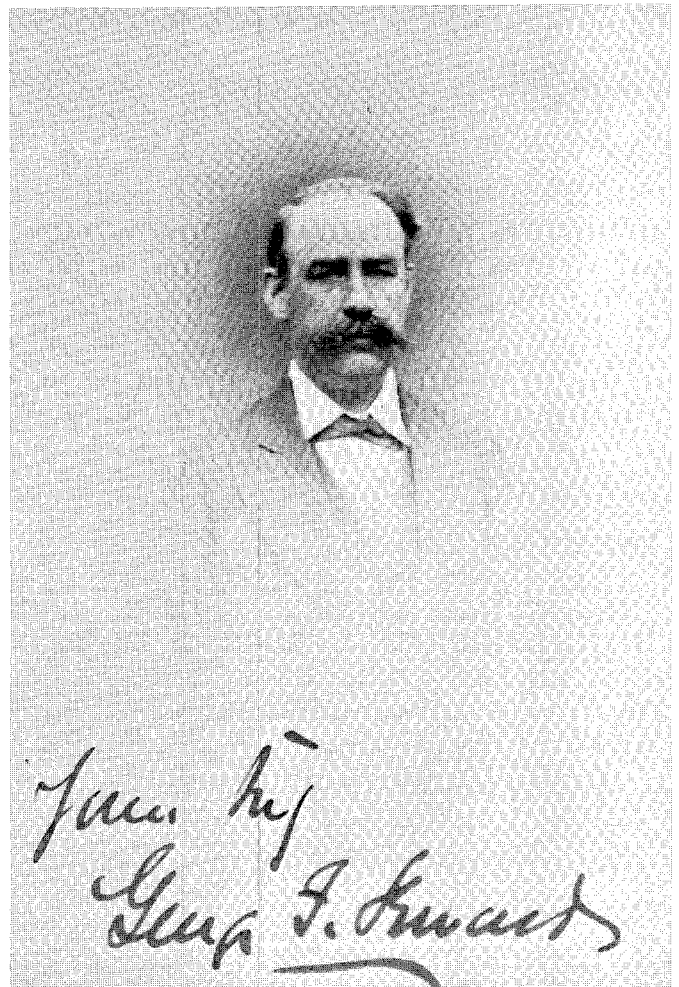
*U.S. minister George F. Seward believed that blanket exclusion would threaten the Western treaty system in China.*  
Photo by A. Fong, Hong Kong, 1879.

and arguments used innumerable times by Western diplomats, the Chinese officials reminded Seward of his nation's treaty obligations. They cited the fifth and sixth articles of the Burlingame Treaty, which guaranteed free immigration and protection to Chinese in America, and requested that Seward communicate their views to Washington, D.C. The American minister's reply read like those written by the Tsungli Yamen when faced with protests of treaty violations in China. Seward pointed out the difficulties of the situation in California, assured the Chinese that his government anxiously sought a solution to the problem, and promised to convey the foreign office's concerns to Washington.<sup>9</sup>

It was not until 1878 that Seward finally became concerned about the effect of the exclusion effort on American-Chinese diplomatic relations. Serious anti-Chinese rioting had occurred in San Francisco in the summer of 1877, and petitions from the California legislature had buttressed the joint congressional committee's findings in favor of exclusion. Under this pressure both houses of Congress passed resolutions urging President Hayes to seek changes in the existing treaties. At this same time China sent its first permanent envoys to the United States, and Seward feared that the Chinese ministers would:

send back to this Government some very unpleasant reports in regard to the treatment of Chinese in California, and they may in turn deal in a very cavalier way with all our efforts to secure redress for wrongs suffered by our countrymen here.<sup>10</sup>

Further, Seward expressed concern that a national anti-Chinese law might threaten the entire Western treaty system in China. Although some congressmen believed that the United States could abrogate through legislation those portions of the American treaties which guaranteed free immigration and protection to the Chinese, the minister contended that such unilateral action by the United States would set a dangerous precedent. The Chinese did not like the existing treaties, he



reminded the new secretary of state, William M. Evarts, and they would welcome justification for declaring null and void all the provisions which they found to be objectionable.<sup>11</sup>

Seward believed, however, that Washington could convince the Tsungli Yamen to revise the American treaty provisions on immigration. The minister reasoned that despite the incidents in California, the Chinese in America enjoyed substantially more rights than did Americans in China. Although there was an element of sophistry in his failure to acknowledge the unequal treaties, technically he was correct in his assessment. Using this "lack of reciprocity" as a bargaining point, Seward continued, the United States could demand that China either extend more privileges to Americans or approve the desired changes in the treaty. The minister predicted:

It is very certain that China would not consent to the extension of the privileges enjoyed by foreigners in this coun-



*In 1878 officials of Chinatown's Six Companies and onlookers welcomed the first resident Chinese ambassador, Chun Lan Pin, and consular corps (far right) to San Francisco in the cabin of the City of Tokio anchored in the Bay.*

try, and it is possible that, rather than do this, she would agree to such a revision of our treaties as I have indicated.<sup>12</sup>

Seward's fears of unilateral congressional action were realized in January, 1879, when the House passed a bill permitting only fifteen Chinese people to enter the United States on any one ship docking on the West Coast. The Senate concurred and added an amendment authorizing the president to abrogate Articles V and VI of the Burlingame Treaty.<sup>13</sup> The western congressmen had finally managed to force action on exclusion.

Many other Americans, however, began to push for a presidential veto. Most eastern newspaper editors and politicians contended that the fifteen-passenger bill violated the sanctity of treaties and reversed America's traditional open-door immigration policy. The *New York Times*, for example, argued that "the enactment of this bill into a law would violate all the principles upon which our government is founded."<sup>14</sup> Religious and commercial groups complained that the bill invited "the danger of retaliatory action" against American missionaries and businessmen in China.<sup>15</sup>

Not surprisingly, President Hayes vetoed the bill. His concern, however, was not with the substance of the legislation but with the method of limitation. Hayes indicated privately that he considered the Chinese "labor invasion" to be "pernicious," classifying the Chinese as one of the "weaker races," along with Negroes and Indians, who would be oppressed in the United States and would make their oppressors "hoodlums or vagabonds." Hayes therefore favored the limitation of Chinese immigration—but by some means consistent with the treaties and with recognized international practices.<sup>16</sup> In reaching this decision Hayes may have conferred with Minister Seward, who was in Washington in February, 1879, because several of the minister's views appeared in the president's public and private statements on the exclusion issue. While preparing to veto the bill Hayes recorded in his diary:



We have accepted the advantages which the treaty gives us. Our traders, missionaries and travelers are domiciled in China. Important interests have grown up under the treaty, and rest upon faith in its observance. One of the parties to a treaty cannot rightfully by legislation violate it.<sup>17</sup>

In his veto message to Congress, the president noted that if the United States abrogated part of the treaty, the Chinese would be free to renounce the Treaty of Tientsin of 1858 upon which rested all American rights in China.<sup>18</sup>

After successfully blocking unilateral congressional action, Hayes began his own diplomatic steps to limit Chinese immigration. "It should be made certain *by proper methods*," he wrote in his diary, "that such an invasion [of Chinese workers] can not permanently override our people. It cannot safely be admitted into the bosom of our American society."<sup>19</sup> Accordingly, Hayes' Secretary of State Evarts instructed Seward to enter into preparatory discussions with the Chinese government on the subject of immigration and to allay their





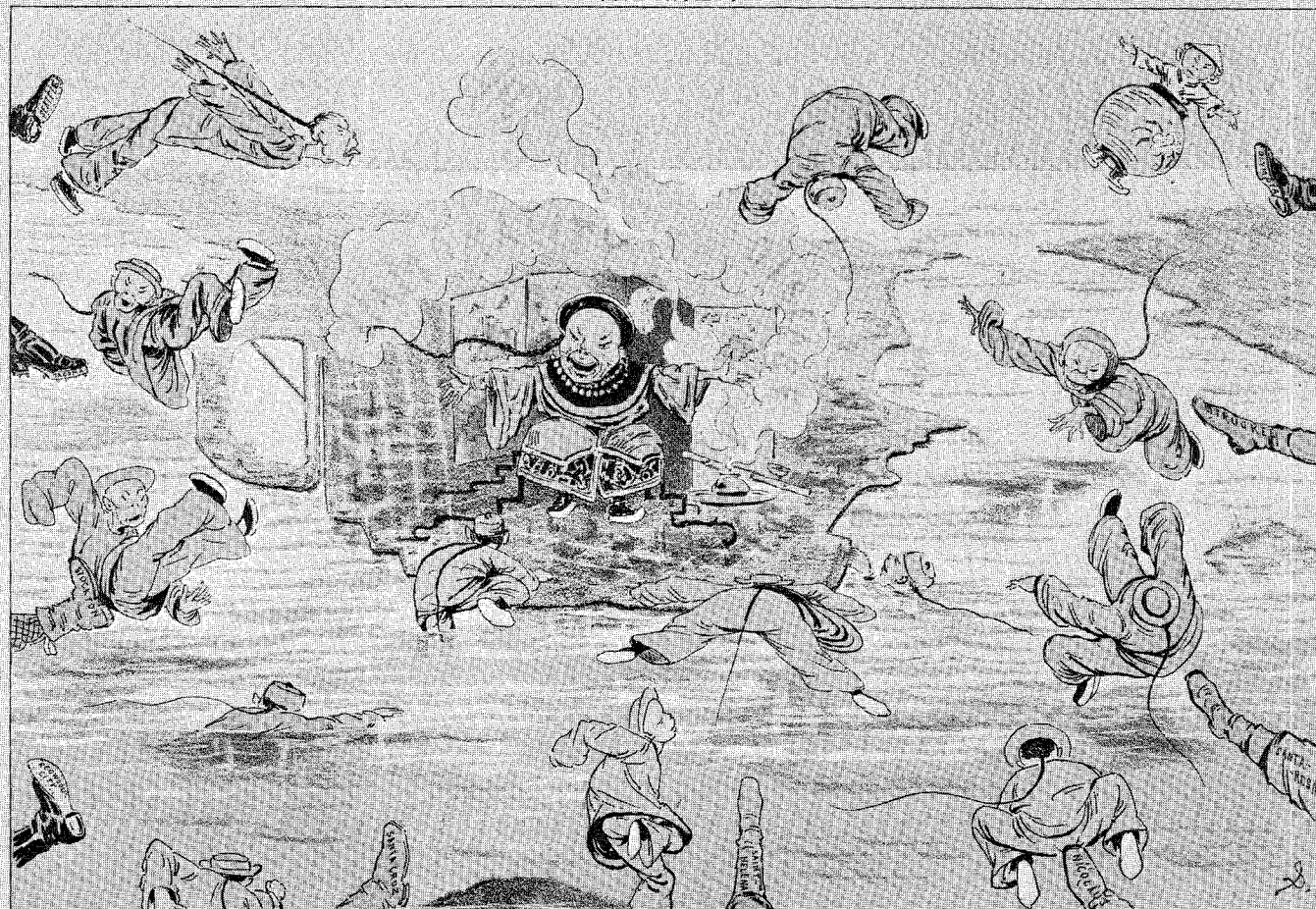
concern about the growing exclusion movement. Evarts also requested facts on the contract labor system and on the number of criminals and other undesirables who emigrated from China. His instructions did not authorize Seward to make any specific treaty proposals, because Hayes and Evarts themselves hoped to draft some revisions acceptable to Americans both at home and in China.<sup>20</sup>

Seward welcomed the opportunity to discuss the immigration question with the Chinese, but he bent his instructions to conform to his own views. Considering massive immigration unlikely, he therefore deemed exclusion an unnecessary complication of the American position in China. Although Seward had frequently ignored the Tsungli Yamen when he found their objections to Western activity troublesome, in this case he exceeded his instructions by assuring the Chinese officials that he sympathized with their grievances. From the perspective of the legation in Peking, antagonizing the Chinese with restrictive legislation would stupidly

exacerbate the chronic Oriental hostility and suspicion toward the West. Meeting with the Tsungli Yamen, Seward boldly expressed the hope that the imperial government would voluntarily limit the emigration of paupers, criminals, and prostitutes to the United States, and thereby he violated his instructions to make no specific proposals to the Chinese. He also refused to raise the question of contract labor, despite Evarts' request for information on this point. In Seward's estimation the Chinese were sensitive to criticism on contract emigration (the so-called "coolie trade"), and broaching the subject would only further irritate an already difficult situation. Instead he chose to be almost apologetic about the anti-Chinese incidents in California and to assure the Tsungli Yamen of America's devotion to "liberal government and humanity."<sup>21</sup> Following his meeting with the Chinese officials, Seward informed Washington in July that

the sooner we rise to the idea of dealing with this Government as being actuated by very much the same motives of





SAN FRANCISCO. Must I support them all?

dignity, patriotism and public policy which actuates other governments, the sooner we shall be able to place our relations upon an enduring basis of good will and common interests.<sup>22</sup>

Seward may have echoed the Burlingame Treaty's doctrine of respect for the Chinese, but he spoke from expediency, not principle. As United States consul general in Shanghai for thirteen years before advancing to the post of minister in 1876, Seward had consistently promoted Western commercial interests. By both inclination and instinct, he thought in terms of what would best serve the needs of Westerners in China, not justice for the Chinese. "Our people in this part of the world, merchants and missionaries," he reiterated in August, "would be much reassured if they could know even that the disruption of our relations with China may be averted."<sup>23</sup>

Seward's official efforts to resolve the immigration issue came to an abrupt halt in 1880. With national elec-

tions approaching in the United States, the Hayes administration identified Seward as a political liability. The minister's refusal to pursue vigorously the immigration issue with the Tsungli Yamen began costing the Republicans potential votes in Pacific Coast states. Moreover, a concerted, although unsuccessful, effort the preceding year in the House of Representatives to impeach Seward for peculation and other alleged offenses in China also made him a political detriment to his party.<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, Evarts asked Seward for his resignation. When the minister stubbornly refused, Hayes formally recalled Seward from his post. Before leaving China, however, Seward made a parting attempt to thwart the exclusion movement. In a farewell gathering he tried to prejudice a high-ranking Chinese official against revision of the Burlingame Treaty by telling him that only the "Irish rabble" in the United States favored exclusion. Further, the exiting minister predicted that future American proposals on Chinese immigration



*Although treaty commissioner Angell found conditions and employment satisfactory in San Francisco, public opinion as evidenced in the Wasp cartoon demanded a radical solution to the "Chinese question."*

would insult the dignity of the imperial government.<sup>25</sup>

Upon his return home Seward wrote a book refuting the pro-exclusion arguments, contending that there was no basis for America's fears of a massive influx of Chinese, that the Chinese had been of great service on the West Coast, and that lawful remedies already existed for such problems as crime in Chinatowns. Seward's book, however, made him seem more liberal and enlightened than he actually was. Although he wrote, for example, that "all men under the sun are worthy in the measure of their intelligence and moral excellence, and not according to their grade in life or the hue of their skin,"<sup>26</sup> a few years earlier he had also written that "the darker races fall successively before the Caucasian" and that "in the long run the Chinese cannot prove the exception."<sup>27</sup> Seward's main consideration, then, was the promotion of foreign interests in China.<sup>28</sup>

Seward left China maintaining that Washington did not understand or appreciate his efforts and that it was ignoring Peking's reaction to American discrimination against Chinese immigrants. Convinced that his diplomatic effort had been terminated for no good reason, Seward pronounced the following potshot valedictory on the role of being an American minister:

The field of labor is so distant and so obscure that effort cannot be expected to win for the given officer adequate compensation. . . . It may . . . bring him into collision with his own Government . . . and the given Government may unwittingly sacrifice its best interests, overruling and condemning its Minister to its own damage.<sup>29</sup>

Secretary of State Evarts named James Burrill Angell as the new American minister plenipotentiary to China. He also designated Angell a treaty commissioner and assigned to him the task of amending the free immigration provisions of the Burlingame Treaty. Selecting Seward's replacement very carefully, Evarts believed

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*Seward's main consideration was the promotion of foreign interests in China.*

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that Angell, a midwesterner, would be more acceptable to the Chinese than a representative of either the West Coast exclusionists or the East Coast mercantilists. Angell was also an educator and the president of the University of Michigan, a background the secretary thought would appeal to the Chinese. Although Angell had no practical diplomatic experience, he knew a great deal about international law, or what President Hayes referred to as "proper methods." In addition, his personal qualities were ideally suited to his delicate assignment. The man who would ask the Chinese government to allow its subjects to be discriminated against by American immigration laws was a sensitive, intelligent, and urbane gentleman. Angell occasionally employed racial stereotypes in his speech, but his private as well as public writings were singularly lacking in racial aspersions, especially compared to those of Seward.<sup>30</sup>

The cautious Angell did not immediately accept the post. He first sought assurance that the appointment as treaty commissioner would be only temporary because he wanted to return quickly to the university. He also expressed serious doubts about reversing America's traditional policy of welcoming immigrants. Angell feared, however, that Congress would eventually pass restrictive legislation despite the Burlingame Treaty and that such unilateral action might cause Chinese retaliation against American treaty rights in China. Some kind of treaty revision permitting congressional regulation was therefore necessary. He informed Evarts that he would accept the position, but only if his instructions did not require him to seek absolute prohibition of Chinese immigration.<sup>31</sup>





*According to the 1880 treaty, merchants, tourists, and scholars were permitted to enter the U.S., but laborers such as this vegetable peddler in Los Angeles (far right) were subject to U.S. limitation and suspension.*

To assist Angell, the State Department appointed two other commissioners plenipotentiary to participate in the treaty negotiations. John F. Swift, who was a San Francisco assemblyman, advocated total exclusion of Chinese immigrants from the U.S.; William H. Trescot of South Carolina, on the other hand, viewed exclusion with professional caution reflecting his considerable diplomatic experience in the service of both the United States and Confederate States of America. All three commissioners were Republicans. Chester Holcombe, the secretary of the legation in Peking and interpreter to the treaty negotiations, later termed the composition of the commission a master political move for the party. The Democrats in Congress grumbled about how this move stole their thunder on the exclusion issue which they had long supported, but they did not dare oppose it.<sup>32</sup>

In May, 1880, Secretary Evarts met several times with Angell and Trescot in Washington to discuss the mission. The secretary gave them no specific instructions—a fact which suggests that the commission was estab-

lished to relieve exclusionist political pressure on the administration rather than to implement any considered policy. The three men agreed that the Chinese immigrants' lack of interest in assimilation created a social problem, but that the United States wanted to be "just and generous" to the Chinese government. Although the meetings dealt with a broad range of potential treaty questions, the three men reached no conclusions. In fact Angell and Trescot learned from Evarts only that the Burlingame Treaty must be revised, that the State Department had no specific changes in mind, that it was the commission's job to make some revisions, and that in doing so they must seek to please people on both sides of the Pacific.<sup>33</sup>

Evarts' written instructions to Angell and his colleagues consisted only of a series of points to be considered during the negotiations with the Chinese. Nor did he provide them with any draft provisions. The secretary told the commissioners only to take into account sentiment on the Pacific coast, United States commercial relations with China, American traditions of liberal admission of foreigners, and the opposition of certain religious groups to exclusion. Evarts sent the commissioners copies of the Democratic and Republican party platform planks on Chinese immigration.<sup>34</sup>

Enroute to Peking, Angell stopped for several days in San Francisco where he talked with Frederick F. Low, a former United States minister to China and former governor of California, and with several other local spokesmen. He also visited Chinatown and met the leaders of San Francisco's Chinese community. Angell determined that although most men in California favored some limitation of immigration because of the problem of non-assimilation, Californians thought that the Chinese should be well treated. The new minister also found neither deplorable conditions in Chinatown nor widespread white unemployment in California, and he concluded that most of the exclusion agitation had been politically motivated and created by the press. In



his opinion a few demagogues had exploited the white agricultural “tramps” who poured into San Francisco after the harvest to become “bummers and sand lot politicians.”<sup>35</sup>

The American commission arrived in Peking in August, 1880, and held its own caucus before making its initial proposals to the Chinese. Swift, the Californian, wanted a treaty which absolutely prohibited Chinese immigration into the United States. Angell and Trescot disagreed, arguing that the treaty should only give Congress the discretion to regulate immigration as it deemed necessary. Although Swift continued to advocate his position vigorously in this session and later meetings, the majority ruled. Trescot accordingly drafted a memorandum to the Chinese

asking that [the United States] shall be allowed to judge for itself to what extent the immigration of Chinese labor is useful and advantageous, and that whenever . . . it feels that its social or industrial interests require a limitation or prohibition of such immigration, it shall have the authority . . . to regulate it as is most consonant with those interests.<sup>36</sup>

At the first negotiating session with the Chinese on October 1, the two Chinese treaty commissioners proposed to leave the Burlingame Treaty unchanged and to make Seward’s proposals concerning the limiting of certain classes of people, such as paupers and prostitutes, the basis for discussion. Trescot countered that Seward’s suggestion had been made without the authorization of his government and that the present commission had come specifically to revise the Burlingame Treaty. The Chinese cooperatively agreed to consider the issues and indicated that they thought a settlement feasible. Trescot thought that the Chinese were stalling. Angell and Swift, however, left the meeting thinking that the emperor’s representatives would negotiate on a basis of limitation of immigration, but not prohibition. Although the Americans were prepared to waive prohibition, they decided to wait a while longer before revealing their hand.<sup>37</sup>

Several days later the Chinese called a meeting and presented the Americans with a full project or draft for a treaty. This draft applied immigration restrictions only to California, exempted “artisans” from the excluded class of “laborers,” and proposed what amounted to an imperial veto over any regulations which Congress might adopt. The Americans expressed their objections to the articles, but the conference adjourned on a cordial note. After this meeting the Americans decided to play their trump and resubmit their own project asking only for limitation, not prohibition.<sup>38</sup>

The decisive treaty session occurred on November 5, 1880, slightly more than a month after the first official









*While the Chinese trusted the U.S. to exercise its treaty rights with discretion, the Wasp in 1886 caricatured Washington's reluctance to enact total exclusion as kowtowing "diplomacy."*

meeting. With both projects before them, the Chinese and American commissioners turned to the first article which dealt with regulating immigration. The two drafts were at such variance that Swift and Trescot were ready to abandon the entire effort, but Angell believed that the Chinese were prepared to negotiate in earnest and counseled patience. "Let us leave this article," he suggested, "and take up the last. Let the fish chew the bait awhile." Turning to other provisions, the two sides quickly came to agreement on several minor points. Returning to the first article and "having now gotten into the mood of agreeing," the commissioners succeeded in "dovetailing" together the two drafts, and the work was done.<sup>39</sup>

The commissioners agreed to the final wording of the treaty on November 8 and signed the document on November 17. Genuine bargaining had taken place between the American commissioners and their Chinese counterparts, and the rapidity of the settlement must have set a record for Sino-Western diplomatic dealings under conditions other than duress. A simultaneous border controversy with Russia may have prompted China to come to quick agreement, but more likely the Chinese simply were not concerned enough about emigration to quibble.<sup>40</sup>

Article I of the Treaty of 1880 allowed the United States to "regulate, limit, or suspend" but "not absolutely prohibit" the immigration of Chinese laborers. The other three articles provided specifically for the entrance of Chinese students, merchants, and tourists into the United States; for protection of Chinese people already residing in America; and for communication to the Chinese government of any laws passed in accordance with the treaty.<sup>41</sup>

Angell, Swift, and Trescot believed that the Chinese only agreed to these terms because of their belief in America's friendship for their country. In their summary report to Washington, the three commissioners concluded that once the Chinese granted that the United

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*The ink was barely dry on the treaty's signatures when Congress began debate on seven different exclusion bills.*

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States should have discretionary power over immigration to the Western country, they assumed that America would "exercise that discretion with justice, and in a spirit of friendship." "We were fortunate enough," continued the commissioners, "to satisfy the Chinese commissioners not only of the justice of our views, but of the entire good faith in which they were advanced."<sup>42</sup> The Chinese apparently trusted that future American restrictions and behavior would be reasonable, and Angell considered the immigration treaty a good solution of the "Chinese question," as it was called in the United States.

Angell's expectation that the United States would find hardly "any need of availing itself of the power conceded it," however, proved sadly inaccurate.<sup>43</sup> The ink was barely dry on the treaty's signatures when Congress began debate on seven different exclusion bills, and the goals of politics and diplomacy continued to be exactly opposite on the immigration question. Congress tended to view the Angell Treaty not as a mutual international accommodation on a sensitive issue but rather as a carte blanche for luring constituents' votes at the expense of Chinese immigrants. Congressional debate centered not on whether to suspend Chinese immigration but rather over how long the suspension should be. The negotiated treaty, purposefully vague, allowed the United States to close immigration for a "reasonable" period, but even the American treaty commissioners did not agree on the timetable. Angell contended that five years was a reasonable period, but Swift maintained that forty years was not excessive.<sup>44</sup>



The first exclusion bill approved by Congress in 1882 under the aegis of the new treaty provided for a twenty-year suspension of immigration of Chinese laborers. It also created an elaborate system of regulations which would have effectively impeded the immigration of merchants, students, and other Chinese whom the treaty had specifically exempted from such restrictions. During the debate on this bill, which had been authored by Senator John F. Miller of California, Senator Joseph Hawley of Connecticut perceptively summarized the ironic history of Sino-Western relations: "We are asked to deny to the Chinaman the right [of immigration and residence which] he was bombarded into accepting" for foreigners in his own country.<sup>45</sup>

President Chester A. Arthur vetoed this twenty-year suspension bill for much the same reason that President Hayes had vetoed the earlier fifteen-passenger-limit bill. The new president agreed with the purpose of the bill but thought that the twenty-year period and onerous regulations were unreasonable and hence indefensible under both the new Angell Treaty and accepted international practices. Unsuccessful at overriding the veto, Congress quickly passed a second bill establishing a ten-year exclusion period and modifying but not removing the provisions affecting the supposedly exempted classes of Chinese. Arthur thought that this substitute bill also went beyond the suspension period and regulations permitted by the Angell Treaty, but he yielded to political pressure for some type of exclusion and signed the law.<sup>46</sup>

In the face of the United States' quick moves to restrict all Chinese immigration to America, the government of China was incapable of responding with anything more than formal remonstrances. Plagued by difficulties much more serious than the treatment of its emigrants in America, China faced increasing pressures from other countries for economic and territorial concessions as well as insurmountable internal problems ranging from pervasive poverty to political upheaval.

China's government, economy, and entire way of life were collapsing under the weight of these burdens, and the Chinese were thus unable to retaliate by restricting the rights of foreigners in China as Seward and Angell had once thought they might.

Washington's move to discriminate against Chinese immigrants in the 1870's and 1880's illustrated more than the way in which domestic political considerations could complicate the nation's diplomatic goals. Its decision to exclude immigrants revealed one of the most unsavory and unequal aspects of Western policy toward China in the nineteenth century: namely, the invocation of treaties and international law to give legitimacy to arbitrary actions against the weak Chinese government. Earlier in the century the Western nations had invaded China's centuries-old isolation, using international conventions and practices to justify their own penetration of Chinese society. The American Treaty of 1880, however, led to an ironic reapplication of diplomatic principles. Again using the sanctimonious shroud of a treaty, the United States in 1882 blocked the entry of the Chinese into American society.

*The print reproduced on pages 32-33 is from Alfred B. Lubbock's The Opium Clippers (Boston, 1933); on page 36, from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, August 17, 1878. The photographs on pages 37, 40, and 41, are from the Title Insurance and Trust Collection, CHS Library; and the Wasp cartoons from February 27, 1886, and April 17, 1886, on pages 38 and 42 are from the CHS Library. The portrait of Seward on page 35 is courtesy The Bancroft Library.*

## Notes

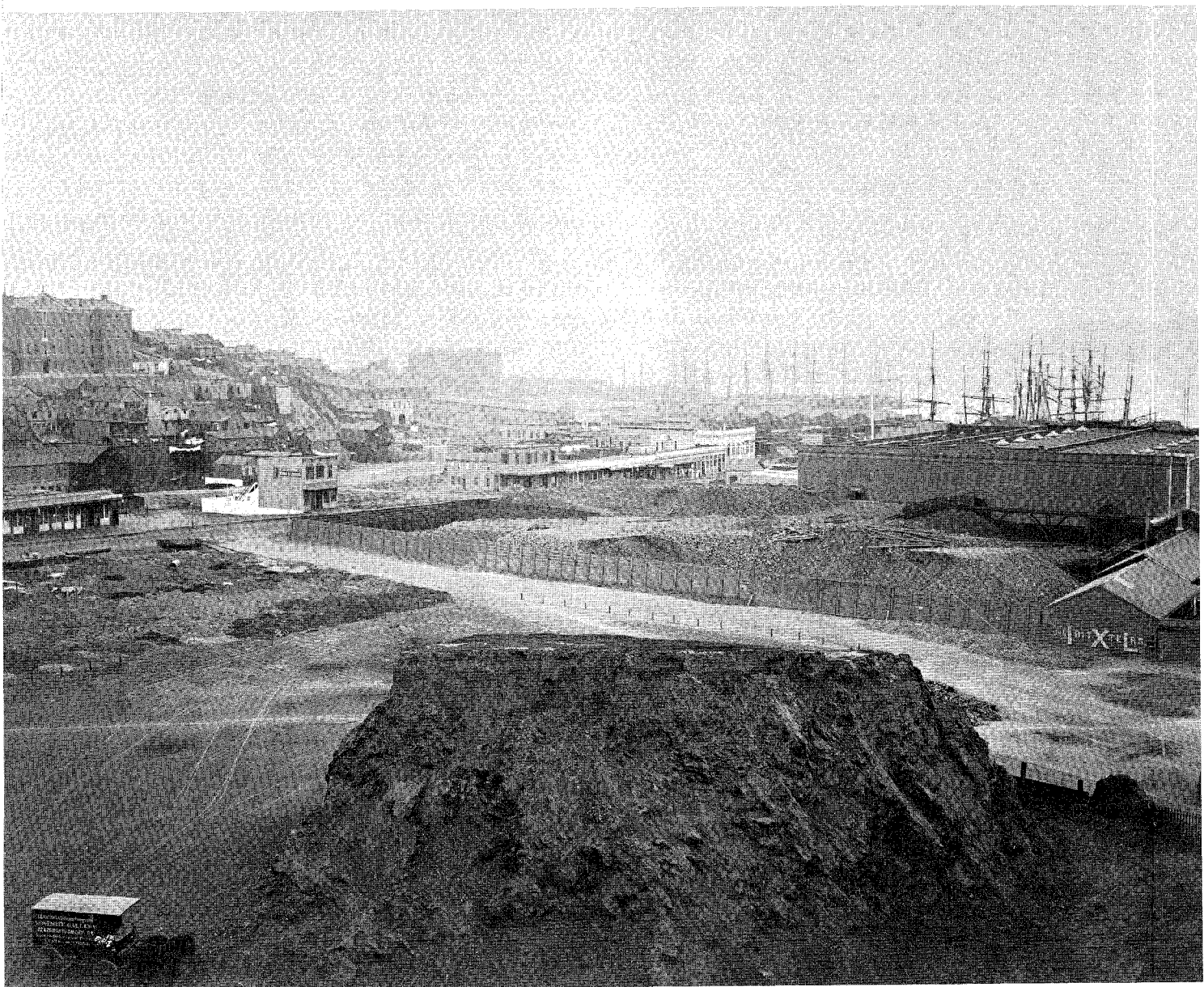
1. Neil L. Shumsky, "San Francisco's Workingmen Respond to the Modern City," *California Historical Quarterly*, 55 (Spring, 1976): 46-51, and the accompanying pictorial history, "The Workingmen's Party in California, 1877-1882," 58-73. See also Roger Olmsted, "The Chinese Must Go!" *California Historical Quarterly*, 50 (Sept., 1971): 285-94.
2. Charles I. Bevans, ed., *Treaties and Other International Agreements*



- of the United States of America 1776-1949 (Washington, 1968-74), 6: 680-84.
3. *Treaties, Conventions, etc., Between China and Foreign States* (Shanghai, 1908), 1:29-46, 159-64, 212-29, 238-42, 509-23, 602-23, 673-78.
4. The statistics on Chinese immigration are approximate. See Mary R. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York, 1909), pp. 425, 501; Elmer C. Sandmeyer, *The Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Urbana, Ill., 1939), p. 17.
5. Sandmeyer, *Anti-Chinese Movement*, 25-39; Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1971), pp. 258-65; Robert McClellan, *The Heathen Chinese* (Columbus, Ohio, 1971), pp. 1-6; Tyler Dennett, *Americans in Eastern Asia* (New York, 1922), pp. 535-40; Stuart Creighton Miller, *The Unwelcome Immigrant: The American Image of the Chinese, 1785-1882* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1969), pp. 3-15, argues that anti-Chinese sentiments were not limited to California and the West Coast.
6. Gary Pennanen, "Public Opinion and the Chinese Question, 1876-1879," *Ohio History*, 77 (Winter, Spring, Summer, 1968): 141.
7. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 96-104, 132-33; John W. Foster, *American Diplomacy in the Orient* (Boston, 1903), pp. 283-93. For Sargent's report, see Senate, *Report No. 689*, 44 Cong., 2 Sess. For Morton's notes see Senate, *Miscellaneous Document No. 20*, 45 Cong., 2 Sess.
8. George F. Seward to Secretary of State Hamilton Fish, March 22, 1876, Despatches from United States Ministers to China, National Archives (hereafter cited as China Despatches).
9. Seward to Fish, June 29, 1876, *ibid.*
10. Seward to Fish, March 13, 1878, *ibid.*; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 83-84, 114-16, 133-34; Pennanen, "Public Opinion," 141-43.
11. Seward to Evarts, March 22, 1878, China Despatches; House, *Report No. 240*, 45 Cong., 2 Sess.
12. *Ibid.*
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21. Seward to Evarts, July 21, 1879, China Despatches.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Seward to Evarts, Aug. 1, 1879, *ibid.*
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27. Seward to Davis, July 18, 1874, Despatches from United States Consuls in Shanghai, National Archives.
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29. Seward to Evarts, May 6, 1880, China Despatches.
30. Angell Diary, 1:3,59.
31. James Burrill Angell, *Reminiscences* (New York, 1912), p. 131; Shirley W. Smith, *James Burrill Angell: An American Influence* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1954), pp. 119-22; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 152.
32. Smith, *Angell*, 122-23; Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration*, 153.
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35. Angell Diary, 1:17-18.
36. Memorandum enclosed in Commission to Evarts, Oct. 11, 1880, China Despatches; Angell Diary, 1:59-60.
37. Commission to Evarts, Oct. 23, 1880, China Despatches; Angell Diary, 1:66-67.
38. Commission to Evarts, Nov. 3, 1880, China Despatches; Angell Diary, 1:70-72.
39. Angell Diary, 1:72-75; Angell, *Reminiscences*, 143-45; Commission to Evarts, Nov. 6, 1880, China Despatches.
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42. Commission to Evarts, Nov. 17, 1880, China Despatches.
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# NORTH FROM PANAMA,





# WEST TO THE ORIENT

## The Pacific Mail Steamship Company

as photographed by  
Carleton E. Watkins

*East from the Second Street hills in 1871, the Pacific Mail Company's ten-acre waterfront empire sprawls untidily across the San Francisco landscape. Flanked by the Marine Hospital in the distance and St. Mary's Hospital at the left, the free-standing remnant of the city's hills in the foreground foreshadows further expansion yet to come. The photographer's portable studio in the lower left corner—a horse and wagon carrying eighty pounds of essential equipment—advertises with characteristic San Francisco modesty: "C. E. Watkins, Landscape Photographer, Views to Order in any part of the State or Coast."*

After the close of the Mexican War in 1848, the United States took control of a vast expanse of land south of the Oregon Territory. The acquisition gained under the banner of Manifest Destiny proved as much a headache as a blessing, however, for transportation to and communication with the infant settlements of Americans in California and Oregon were urgently required.

Binding the newly acquired areas to the Union posed a difficult task. Three thousand wilderness miles separated the Atlantic seaboard from the Pacific, and it took at least three months by sail around Cape Horn to reach the new American west coast. Travel was risky, undependable, and too time-consuming for the needs of government and business. It was not a problem that the government could long ignore.

The American Congress acted with rare dispatch, authorizing for a second time in 1847 the Secretary of the Navy to contract for ocean mail service to the Pacific coast. He awarded the contract to Tennessee politician Arnold Harris, who three days later reassigned it—for a handsome profit—to William Henry Aspinwall, a wealthy and influential New York merchant. Accordingly, Aspinwall and his associates secured a

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Mr. Weinstein, former Art Director of the *California Historical Quarterly* and a contributing editor of *American West Magazine*, is a well-known maritime historian. He has recently published *Collection, Care and Use of Historical Photographs*, and his book on Wilhelm Hester, Puget Sound marine photographer, will appear in the fall of 1978.

John H. Kemble's published work on the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, *The Panama Route, 1848-1869*, remains the definitive source for anyone who follows in his footsteps. Liberal use has been made in this article of his thoughts and certain of his precise modes of expression. Grateful acknowledgment is made for his excellent scholarship, without which this essay would not have been possible.



charter in 1848 from the New York legislature to incorporate as the Pacific Mail Steamship Company. The seemingly inauspicious event marked the beginning of the company's thirty-year domination first of the Pacific coastwise trade and then of the rich Orient trade which had tantalized men's imaginations for centuries.

Aspinwall and his fellow Yankee merchants set out to pioneer a route along the Pacific coast from Panama to the Columbia River and Puget Sound, with stops at San Diego, Monterey, and San Francisco. Other steamship operators would be allowed to bring passengers and freight to the Pacific Mail steamers at Panama; the Pacific Mail Steamship Company alone would carry them northward along the Pacific coast. A no-nonsense monopoly was their goal.

Required by the Navy Department to build steamers that could safely carry passengers, freight, and mail—and be easily converted to naval auxiliaries in time of war—the partners wasted no time. They ordered the laying down of three wooden sidewheel steamers even before their fledgling company was incorporated. The *California*, *Panama*, and *Oregon*, completed by the fall of 1848, were 200 feet long, 34 feet beam, and 20 feet deep. Weighing just over 1000 tons gross, they were powered with single, side-lever engines supplied with steam by two coal-fed boilers. They could carry 50 or 60 passengers cramped into tiny cabins and 150 to 200 additional steerage passengers in bearable discomfort. In case of distress at sea, they carried generous amounts of canvas and wooden spars.

When President Polk announced on December 5, 1848, the electrifying discovery of gold in California, the demand for space aboard the Pacific Mail's tiny steamers soared wildly. Gold seekers at Panama who desperately wished to travel north assaulted company ticket-takers, and the wharves became the scene of angry riots. Almost anything that floated was hastily pressed into service on the Pacific coast route in the mad frenzy to reach the gold fields.

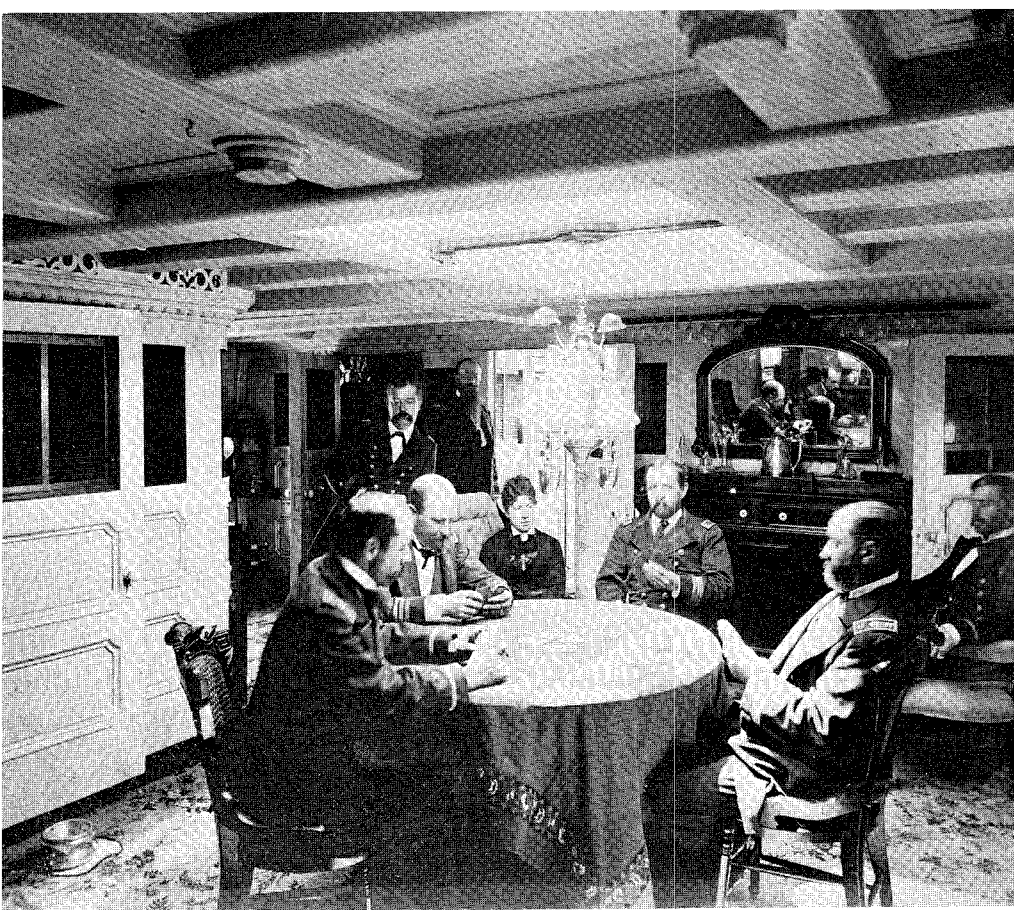
The first steamship to leave Panama for the promised land was the little *California*, which staggered to sea badly overloaded. Built to carry a maximum of 250 passengers, she departed with 365 neophyte miners, merchants, officials, and assorted adventurers crowding her decks. Nearing Point Concepción on the California coast, she ran out of coal, and her wooden spars, bunks, transoms, and cabin ornaments were fed to her hungry boilers. Happily someone discovered a hundred sacks of coal stowed as ballast, and the helpless steamer finally reached Monterey Bay. The crew and selected male passengers willing to work for \$5 a day cut enough wood at Monterey to bring the ship into the Bay of San Francisco on February 28, 1849.

Within a week of her arrival at San Francisco, the *California's* entire crew departed for the mines, leaving on board only an engine-room boy and the ship's master. On her return trip southward, the *California*, bunkered with coal from an English collier dispatched to San Francisco by the concerned Pacific Mail owners, ran out of fuel again and had to burn her spars, berths, bulkheads, and boats in order to reach Taboga Island, her Panama station.

Pacific Mail ships continued to be crowded, particularly those headed as far north as the gold fields. Bound home on the southward passage were those lucky few who had found their gold and kept it together, with a large number of the disappointed, the sick, and the unlucky.

Additional steamers—the *Tennessee*, *Unicorn*, *Columbia*, and the well-known *Golden Gate*—were added to the fleet as demands for service mounted. Soon joining them were the *Colorado*, *Constitution*, *Golden City*, *Sacramento*, *Winfield Scott*, *Sonora*, *John L. Stephens*, and *Golden Age*. Regular service was instituted on July 15, 1850, and these scheduled sailings, termed "Steamer Days," became minor civic galas generating great interest and enthusiasm. The speedy *Golden Gate* set the record for the California passage from Panama to San





*First-class passengers enjoyed sumptuous surroundings which compared favorably with drawing rooms ashore.*

San Francisco by arriving at the Bay in 11 days, 4½ hours.

When American engineers finally completed the railroad spanning the Isthmus of Panama in January, 1855, the agonies of the early transit on foot and muleback were mercifully ended. Freight and passengers, however, now descended in droves on Pacific Mail's embarkation wharves and completely overwhelmed the company's transport capacity. Competition for this new business increased ferociously. Rate-cutting wars on coastal runs flared, and Pacific Mail countered its opposition with tactics best understood by monopolists: reducing rates, buying out competitors, and compromising to gain future strength.

In time each of Pacific Mail's competitors sold their vessels to the company, which promptly added them to its own large fleet. The able and ruthless Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt finally agreed to confine his activities to the Atlantic, and on February 17, 1860, the company took over his Pacific coast steamers—the *Cortes*, *Orizaba*, *Sierra Nevada*, and *Uncle Sam*—for its own coastwise service.

As the Civil War drew to its close in 1865, Yankee entrepreneurs again turned to the idea of the Pacific Ocean as a trade highway to the Orient. California mer-

chants clamored for steamship service to the East, and once more Congress acted quickly, obliging Californian constituents on February 18, 1865, with an act creating an Asiatic service. Offering a \$500,000 subsidy for the operation of a transpacific steamship line, Congress awarded the contract to the sole bidder, the Pacific Mail Company.

In 1867 Pacific Mail opened its transpacific line from their home port, San Francisco, with four wooden paddlewheel steamers, the *America*, *China*, *Japan*, and *Great Republic*. The largest of their type and constructed to order in East Coast shipyards, each measured approximately 4000 tons gross and was just over 360 feet in length, 47 to 49 feet beam, and about 23 feet deep. Each wooden giant cost over \$100,000.

The decision to build the steamers of wood instead of iron proved fateful for Pacific Mail. Although these luxurious giants provided effective transpacific service and enjoyed great popularity with passengers, they were costly to operate and outmoded from the day their builders laid down their keels. Iron ships and screw propellers had already replaced wooden sidewheelers in many trades, and iron steamers would quickly enough replace these already obsolete Pacific Mail sidewheelers



*White workingmen blamed Pacific Mail and its Canadian counterpart for carrying Chinese laborers to America who, according to this Wasp cartoon, threatened to inundate San Francisco and its native businesses with cheap labor.*



as well. In 1872 Congress presented a new contract for bi-monthly service and increased the former half-million dollars subsidy to a million dollars. The new contract, however, required the use of iron, screw-propelled steamers. The largest commercial steamers ever built, the largest ocean steamers to be driven by paddle wheels, would soon sail no more.

Wooden steamers would long be remembered as giants of the sea, for each carried 250 passengers in its cabins and 1200 souls in its steerage accommodations. Even though each steamer stowed 1500 tons of coal in its commodious bunkers, additional coal needed to be taken on at Yokohama to complete the passage to Hong Kong. Each vessel, rigged as a three-mast bark, carried generous supplies of canvas, sails, and spars in the event of distress at sea.

Cabin passengers enjoyed a luxurious life aboard one of these vessels. The main deck offered a covered dining room and social hall 120 feet long, with twenty-six double staterooms and two bridal rooms opening off the center hall. Each stateroom measured 8-by-10

feet and had two doors, one opening into the covered social hall and the other onto the main deck outside. Sumptuous furnishings foreshadowed the luxury of ocean travel fifty years later. Fine woods, rich fabrics, and ornamental gilt were lavishly used in decoration, and staterooms compared favorably with well-to-do drawing rooms ashore.

On board, cabin passengers received the tenderest of care, while first-class passengers were pampered with attention. They both enjoyed customs inspections aboard the ship and were always landed first from an after gangway. Frequent letters in newspapers attested to the satisfaction transpacific travelers enjoyed aboard Pacific Mail's steamers.

Nor were steerage passengers overlooked. Their accommodations in 1867 on the transpacific run were almost comparable to those provided first-class cabin passengers on the pioneer steamers of 1849.

The Chinese crews which manned the vessels were universally praised, particularly for their courtesy, cleanliness, efficiency, and quiet manner. In an effort to



reduce operating costs in 1867, the company replaced most white seamen and black stewards on transpacific steamers with Chinese crews. Important savings in wages and in food costs resulted immediately. The Chinese proved good seamen, clearly more satisfactory than most white sailors available in Pacific ports.

While the shift to Chinese crews proved prudent for Pacific Mail, not everyone was pleased by its new hiring practices. Between 1873 and 1875, 260,000 people arrived in California, many of them factory hands from the East looking for employment. But jobs were already scarce in California, and as a flood of ready-made products penetrated the West after the opening of the transcontinental railroad, the outlook for unemployed workmen became especially bleak.

The presence of many thousands of Chinese workmen released from their jobs after the completion of the transcontinental railroad did not improve the employment situation. Their arrival in California cities only stretched battle lines already being drawn taut, and worsening economic conditions made tinderboxes of West Coast cities which needed only a spark to explode.

Unemployed white workers in 1877 believed that the underpaid and overworked Chinese workmen were their enemies. Frequently, the strong and capable Chinese were willing to take low-paying jobs which most white workers were too stiff-necked to accept. Frustrated white workmen soon were led to believe that the Pacific Mail Steamship Company, which seemingly brought in Asiatic competition by the boatload, was their enemy as well.

Spurred into violence, one night they attempted to burn down the newly-constructed Pacific Mail wharves and offices shown in Carleton Watkins' photographs. Throughout 1877 infuriated workmen repeatedly demonstrated in protest against the transport of Chinese into California aboard company ships and attempted ineffectually to delay the sailing of its steamers.

For the Pacific Mail Company, the large numbers of

Chinese they carried to the Orient and back proved to be a very profitable business. Although the price of a single passage was slight, fares comprised a significant part of the company's income because of the steady increase of Chinese making passages. In 1865 the cost of steerage accommodations from San Francisco to Hong Kong was \$55.50. As the volume of eastbound passengers increased, the price was gradually lowered until it stabilized at \$40.00 in gold.

Chinese passengers almost always traveled in the steerage. This meant that they occupied space in the berth deck plus a few parts of the forward main deck. They slept in simple berths consisting of canvas stretched over wooden frames. They prepared their own food in special galleys, and some wealthy Chinese preferred to travel in steerage because the food was more to their liking.

Because the albeit profitable Orient trade was not overly lucrative, Pacific Mail experienced little competition on its transpacific run. (It would come some twenty years later from a resurgent Japan.) On the whole the company enjoyed good fortune, and while its vulnerable steamers had their share of normal misfortunes, they were not considered unlucky ships. The stress of North Pacific voyaging was predictably severe, and accidents were to be expected. But punishing as the wind and sea could be, they could not compare with the most dreaded danger, fire.

Fire struck the company's great wooden sidewheelers but a few times, each with savage consequences. In 1872 the wooden steamer *America* was lost while lying to the Pacific Mail buoy in the harbor at Yokohama. A fire starting in several bales of hay stowed aft in the steerage quarters spread rapidly, mounted in consuming fury, and finally forced abandonment of the stricken steamer. Fifty-three of the fifty-nine lives lost were Chinese passengers. Lacking direction from the ship's officers and crew, many terrified Chinese jumped overboard with their possessions and drowned. Others

floating in the water near the ship were struck by thrown or falling objects. Although little use was made of the ample number of lifeboats, the captain and crew were officially praised for their heroism.

The second Pacific Mail tragedy, the loss of the *Japan* near Hong Kong in December, 1874, proved even more harrowing. Just before midnight in rough seas, fire was discovered in the forward coal bunker. In confusion heightened by rough seas, wind, and darkness, the ship was quickly abandoned. Of the 429 passengers aboard, 391 Chinese and 1 of the 4 European passengers lost their lives. In addition 23 officers and crew were lost. Because most Chinese passengers were berthed forward and the lifeboats were located aft, the fury of the fire between them made launching the wooden steamer's lifeboats nearly impossible.

**T**he appearance of Pacific Mail's first iron, screw-propelled steamship in 1874 signalled the demise of her wooden sisterships. One by one they were lost or dropped from use in the transpacific trade, the last of the old paddlewheelers, *China*, letting go her lines and setting out on her final passage in June of 1879.

The never-to-be-forgotten sidewheelers had initiated and developed steamship service on the Pacific from San Francisco to Yokohama, Shanghai, and Hong Kong for thirteen years. They had successfully carried passengers, freight, and treasure, usually silver bars of Mexican dollars. They had created an avenue of Chinese immigration that enriched this country, and they had carried the founders of many Chinese communities to the United States. For the first eight years they were the only vessels on the pioneer transpacific route—as they had been on the coastwise service in 1849.

The Pacific Mail Steamship Company was a proud corporate giant, its successes in transpacific and coastwise steamship service widely known and esteemed. Its

friendship was solicited openly, and wise men avoided its hostility. Its every maneuver was reported at length in the daily press and discussed in private circles with interest. San Francisco was its headquarters and its home port. When growing business required expansion of its facilities, the company built new wharves, larger depots and warehouses, and a modern coaling yard with portable coal hoppers for its ships.

All of these facilities were constructed on ten waterfront acres in downtown San Francisco, between Townsend, Japan, and Brannan streets. Deservedly, the construction was duly reported in the press amid paeans of civic pride. Praise flowed like free wine at a picnic. It was then inevitable that the proud directors of the company would require photographs of their latest additions, an established custom among San Francisco's elite. Photographers to do the job properly were close at hand, but only the town's acknowledged best was good enough for Pacific Mail.

The photographer selected by the company to execute this flourish of self-praise was an admired forty-three-year-old transplanted easterner, Carleton E. Watkins, a self-styled landscape artist. By 1872 Watkins, proprietor of the Yosemite Art Gallery on fashionable Montgomery Street, was accepted as a leader of San Francisco's professional photographic community. He was a boyhood chum of the powerful railroad magnate Collis Huntington and an intimate of Clarence King's intellectual circle. King spoke of Watkins as the finest photographer he knew.

Watkins was an outdoor photographer who did not make portraits or still lifes inside a studio, but spent his time ranging up and down the entire Pacific Coast and in the Southwest, photographing the landscape and other out-of-doors subjects. He was the agreed-upon leader in this field, for he possessed uncommon command of his craft and a photographic vision keenly sensitive to natural beauty. He routinely produced needle-sharp negatives on sheets of polished glass as





*The arrival of a Pacific Mail steamer from the Orient was an event felt throughout the city. Crowds of people and vehicles assembled at the wharf, including Chinese merchants who were consignees of the cargo.*

large as sixteen-by-twenty inches and in some cases as immense as twenty-by-twenty-four inches.

The original prints made for the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in 1871 are splendid examples of Watkins' particular talent for making sharply focused twenty-by-twenty-four inch negatives bursting with detail. The large originals commanded a presence that is regrettably missed in smaller reproductions.

Because Watkins was almost always in the field shooting new views, he turned over the making of paper prints from his negatives—as did many of his colleagues—to professional print-making establishments. Prints were produced by exposing the negative and the printing-out paper to the sun's natural light, a process requiring little technical expertise and permitting no artistic manipulation, and many photographers were content to have it done for them. For a view photog-

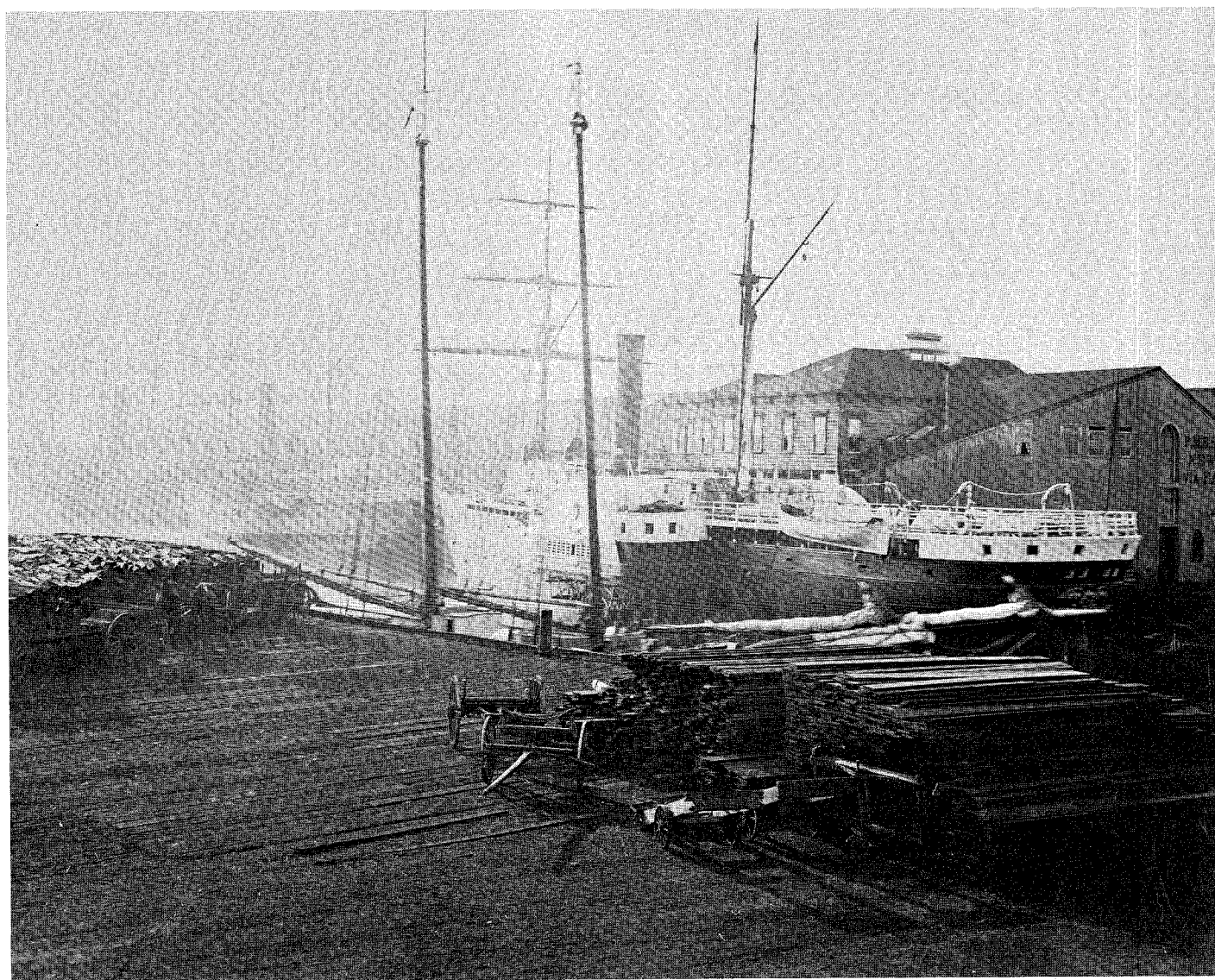
rapher regularly away from his studio, such assistance was often a necessity.

Because the photographs shown here were commissioned in advance, their sale presented little problem to Watkins. Most of his large prints were mounted on over-sized, india-colored boards frequently imprinted in advance with the customer's name, a description of the photograph, and the photographer's name and address.

Both the buildings pictured and the original negatives from which the prints were made are gone forever, and these surviving images offer our only opportunity to see the headquarters complex of the Pacific Mail Steamship Company in 1871. The prints are equally a testament to the splendor of the country's first trans-pacific steamship line and to the vision and skill of California's gifted photographer, Carleton E. Watkins.

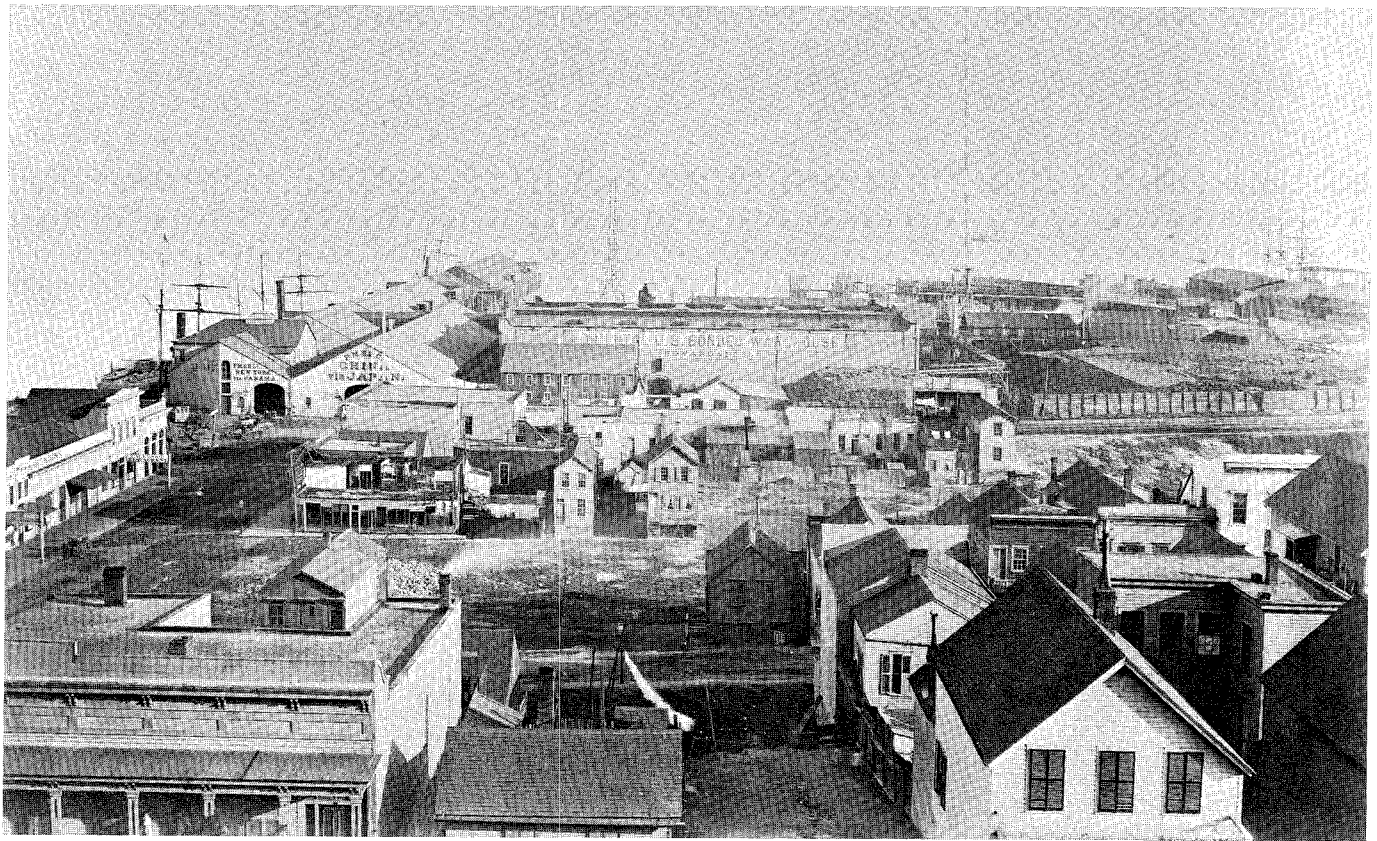


## *Watkin's Pacific Mail Portfolio*



*Shrouded in early morning mist, four of Pacific Mail's pioneer sidewheel steamers tug on their lines at the Panama slip. The first steamship to sail north from Panama for Pacific Mail, the tiny California at right, still bears on her paddlewheel box the letters USM for United States Mail. To her left, almost obscured, lies another ancient voyager, the well-known paddler Senator. Resting in 1871 with two unidentified consorts, they mark the near obsolescence of coastwise service. The transcontinental railroad had made good its promise of besting the time required for the sea journey and dramatically reducing the cost of the trip.*



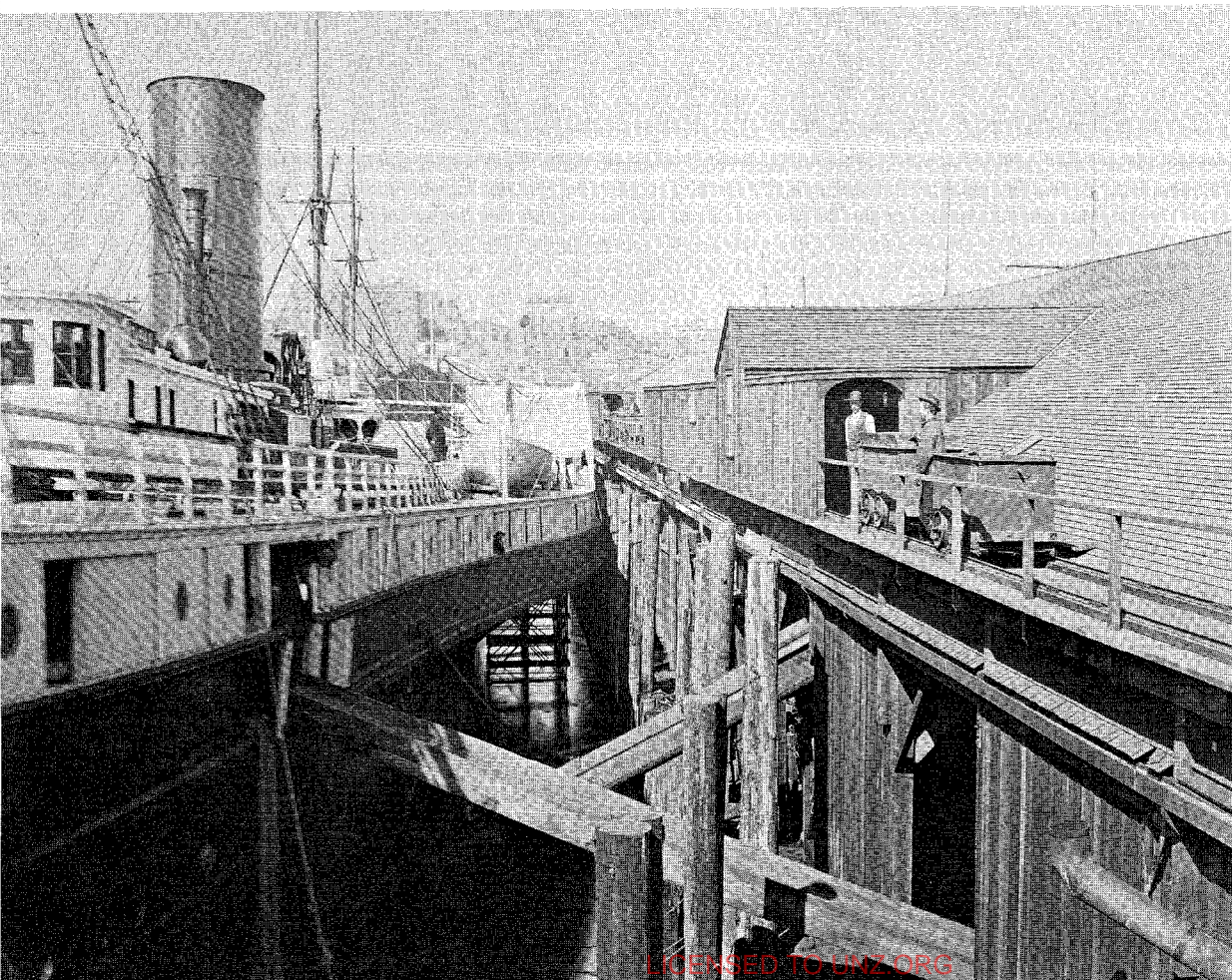
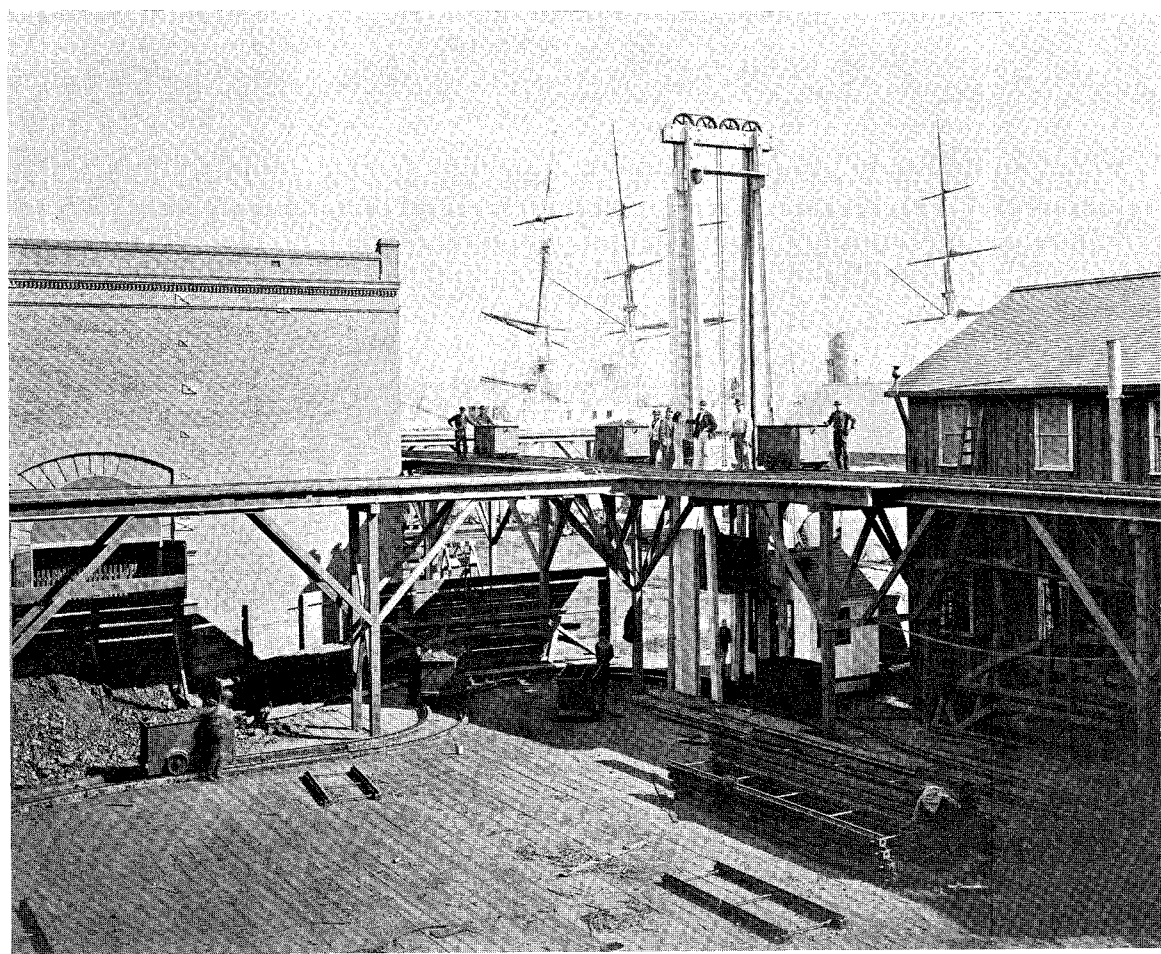


*Traveling San Franciscans knew the Pacific Mail Company departure sheds (at left) at the foot of First and Brannan streets as the doorway to either "East"—New York or the Orient. The tranquility of the warehouses, coal yards, and old wooden structures on the day of this photograph does not suggest the excitement of sailing days—the entrance to the docks clogged with drays, shouting porters, wide-eyed passengers, and screaming gulls.*



*Lying tied up at Pacific Mail's Panama docks are the oldtimers, the sidewheeler Senator at the right and behind her, in the center of the picture, the larger and more powerful Colorado, a trusted workhorse. At the far left looms Billy Starr's old brick Occidental Warehouse, taken over and renamed by its new owners the Oriental Bonded Warehouse. Spare engine parts lie at the lower right, while the company's machine shops are housed at center in the unpainted wooden sheds. Yerba Buena island looms in isolated loneliness in the background.*

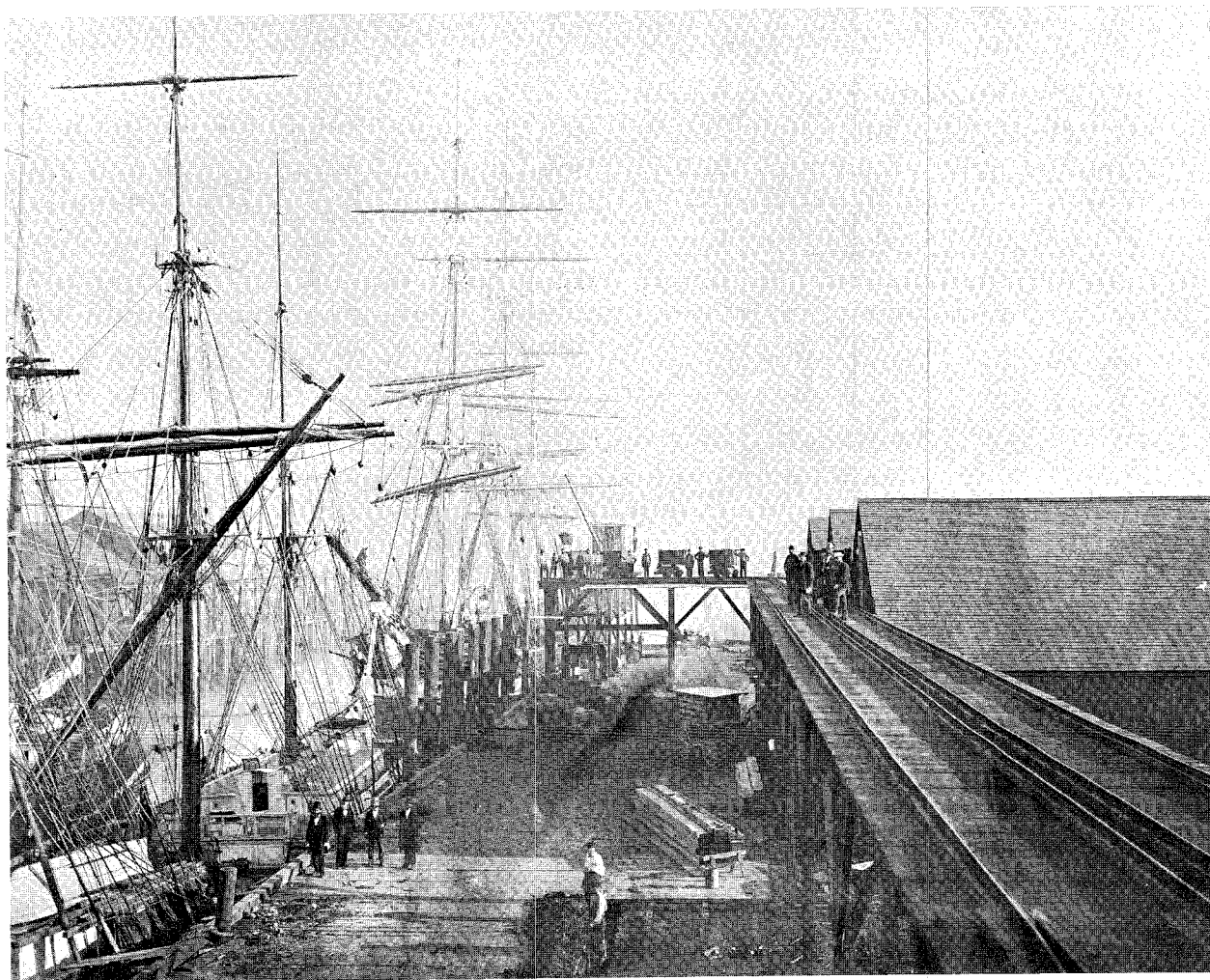






*The coaling operation was not, as it dared not be, a haphazard affair. The powerful chain hoist shown here lifted or lowered the sheet-metal hopper cars from the lower tracks to the upper. Guided along the curving tracks by two workmen, the loaded cars and the clattering empties added to the daily din. Workmen stop at attention for their photograph, while the white-trousered company official stands near the hoist where he believes he should be, the center of the picture.*

*Loading for a transpacific crossing, the Japan, one of the four wooden sidewheelers (below left) especially built for the Orient trade, makes ready for sea. At right are tracks, hopper cars, chutes, and workmen who load coal into the steamers' bunkers. The outboard sweep of the sponsons, the great wooden paddlewheel guards, gleams white behind the lifeboat at center. The huge paddlewheels and iron supports stand silent, visible in the shimmering water.*



*Without coal to fire their boilers, Pacific Mail's steamers were virtually helpless, and supplies of "black diamonds" arrived regularly at the company's great coal yard. Foreign sailing vessels unload in this photograph, the nearest low in the water with her cargo and astern of her an old-time collier of classic build. A third collier at the far left awaits her turn to unload—and completes an everyday scene at the Pacific Mail docks. The elevated tracks, coal cars, and steam-powered crane on wheels are essential to the coaling operation. Here again photographer Carleton Watkins has driven his portable studio directly into the scene. At his command for immobility, company officials on the wharf and company workmen on the elevated tracks freeze into position.*





*Hardy, skillful, and resourceful, Chinese sailors formed America's invisible merchant marine.*

Historians and maritime enthusiasts have occasionally acknowledged the presence of Chinese sailors in America's maritime service. When recognition has been given, however, it has always been either restrained, in the belief that the Chinese involvement was insignificant, or given from a biased point of view, which denies the possibility of any objective and reliable study of the Chinese presence.<sup>1</sup> In the course of research into literary and social aspects of the maritime history of the West Coast, this investigator became increasingly aware of the contributions made by Chinese in the maritime service and that those contributions reached substantial proportions between the years 1876 and 1906. Ultimately, it became apparent that the Chinese experience is a significant and, as yet, unwritten chapter in the maritime history of the United States.

Knowledge about the Chinese who served American commerce before 1915 is difficult to obtain, and records concerning their numbers, the positions they served on board vessels, and their living conditions are few, scattered, or non-existent. The virtual disappearance of Chinese from American shipping after 1915 and the controversial nature of hiring them during the Chinese exclusion period produced further obstacles to obtaining accurate information.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, considerable attention was given the "problem" of Chinese sailors by federal and state governments and especially

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The author expresses appreciation for the kind aid given him in preparing this article by the University of Liverpool Archive Center, the Maritime Group of St. John's University—Newfoundland, the Huntington Library, the Bancroft Library, and especially for the patience and support received over many months from Robyn Gottfried and Dan Nealand of the San Bruno Regional Branch of the National Archives and Records Service.



by organized labor. In 1882, for example, the Representative Assembly of Trades and Labor Unions on the Pacific Coast, meeting to urge passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act, issued a report listing the number of Chinese laborers who were engaged in various occupations in San Francisco, including maritime service. The report read:

The steamers of the Occidental & Oriental Steamship Company and the Pacific Mail Steamship Company carry Chinese firemen, cooks, waiters, and servants for the officers.

United States Government vessels on the Pacific stations likewise carry Chinese cooks and servants for the officers.

On the authority of the United States Shipping Commissioner of San Francisco, the number of Chinese employed on vessels of this port coming under his official supervision is 350. In addition to these, there are many in the coasting trade as cooks and stewards.<sup>2</sup>

The Trades Assembly report is the earliest known statement about the numbers of Chinese in the maritime service, and in light of the year it was issued, it becomes critical to any subsequent investigation into the Chinese involvement. The report was given credence as late as 1971, for example, by a scholarly investigation of union activity in California. The figure it quotes, 350, is misleading, however, and falls far short of the actual numbers of Chinese who were working for the transpacific and coastwise steamship lines. It is also an inaccurate statement in that it helped to perpetuate the belief, both desired and based upon ignorance, that the Chinese who were directly engaged in American commerce were firemen, cooks, waiters, and servants only.<sup>3</sup>

Six years later a *San Francisco Examiner* reporter speculated that some 700 Chinese were employed on China steamers alone, and the *Alta California* claimed in the same year that the number was more likely 1,280.<sup>4</sup> In 1901, the report of the Chinese Exclusion Convention of California carried a statement signed by three representatives of the Pacific coast maritime unions that "all steam vessels regularly engaged in trade between San Francisco and Asiatic ports employ Chinese

# CHINESE SAILORS

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## America's invisible merchant marine 1876-1905



and Japanese exclusively in the deck, engineers' and stewards' departments." The report specified that Chinese served the vessels operated by Pacific Mail and Occidental and Oriental, while Japanese served the Toyo Kasen Kaisha Line.<sup>5</sup> There was no reference to numbers of men and vessels.

The United States Senate Committee on Immigration held Chinese exclusion hearings in 1902, and Andrew Furuseth, secretary of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific and president of the International Seamen's Union, spoke as a member representing trade unions in California. In response to the question, "How many Chinese are engaged in this (transpacific) service?" Furuseth replied, "The exact number I could not give." He did state, however, that the steamships of Pacific Mail and "another company [probably the Northern Pacific Steamship Company operating out of Washington state] carry all Chinese." He explained that the steamships were regularly manned by 100 to 200 men each, of which "about 15 men" were "white" citizens of the United States. He failed to state the number of steamships serving both lines, nor did he mention the names of other lines. The declarations given by the Trades Assembly, shipping commissioner, newspaper reporters, union representatives in 1901, and Furuseth—all supposedly knowledgeable individuals and groups—illustrate how difficult it has been to document reliable information about the Chinese who worked on board vessels in American commerce.

A reasonable approach to investigating the problem of the number of Chinese crewmen is to consider the companies that dominated the transpacific trade and the vessels employed on the runs. The Pacific Mail Steamship Company, chartered in 1848, made its first transpacific run in 1867 with the aid of its first annual congressional subsidy of \$500,000. The Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company, with whom Pacific Mail shared its San Francisco docks and facilities, was incorporated in California in 1874 and chartered its fleet of

steamships from the company popularly known as the White Star Line. Its vessels flew the British flag until it shut down operations in 1908. Chinese were employed as crew members on all the vessels operating in this transpacific service.<sup>7</sup>

Both companies' steamships were large, ranging in weight from 2,600 to 5,000 tons gross, and utilized steam and sail for motive power. Operation of each vessel's engine room, cabins, steerage, saloons, and four masts, which were either ship- or bark-rigged, required sizeable crews that ranged from 70 to 175 members. After 1900, larger steamships weighing over 11,000 tons gross weight, such as the *Korea*, *Siberia*, *Manchuria*, and *Mongolia*, were added to the fleets (see Chart A for complete list of steamships considered in this study).

During the years 1875-1882, the two companies cooperated officially to provide "monthly transpacific service to San Francisco, with alternate sailings every fifteen days," or twenty-four round voyages a year.<sup>8</sup> An examination of the records kept by the Port Collector of San Francisco, however, shows that the yearly number of sailings was usually higher, probably because of fluctuations in trade and the number of steamships used in any one year. In 1877, for example, combined voyages totaled thirty-seven, and by 1882 they increased to forty-five (see Chart B for count of voyages in 1882). From 1883 to 1906, the companies agreed to increase sailings to three times a month, or thirty-six a year. Port records, however, show that the two companies averaged thirty-two voyages for each year in the twenty-four year period (see Chart C for voyages in 1888). The number of transpacific round voyages from 1876 to 1906 totalled 929 (see Chart A for count of voyages).

The most complicating factor in any attempt to document reliable information about the number of Chinese crewmen employed by both companies was the nature of their recruitment. They were hired in Hong Kong for each round-trip voyage to San Fran-



CHART A—1876–1906

Steamship <sup>1</sup>	Years	Total Crew Range	Average Chinese Crew	Total Round Voyages	Total Chinese Crew
<i>Alaska</i> —PM	1876–82	107–120	82	× 19	= 1558
<i>Arabic</i> —O&O	1882–89	120–132	80	× 20	= 1600
<i>Belgic</i> (I)—O&O	1876–91	78–99	60	× 66	= 3960
<i>Belgic</i> (II)—O&O	1892–98	109–120	85	× 27	= 2295
<i>China</i> (I)—PM	1877–80	103–120	55	× 11	= 605
<i>China</i> (II)—PM	1889–1906	125–175	117	× 66	= 7722
<i>City of New York</i> —PM	1876–82	97–105	57	× 24	= 1368
<i>City of Peking</i> —PM	1876–1903	117–133	85	× 113	= 9605
<i>City of Rio De Janeiro</i> —PM	1882–1901	110–120	85	× 87	= 7395
<i>City of San Francisco</i> —PM	1876–77	103–115	57	× 7	= 399
<i>City of Sidney</i> —PM	1876–82	100–112	60	× 24	= 1440
<i>City of Tokio</i> —PM	1876–85	100–137	65	× 36	= 2340
<i>Colima</i> —PM (Honolulu)	1876–82	88–100	52	× 40	= 2080
<i>Colorado</i> —PM	1876	109	77	× 1	= 77
<i>Constitution</i> —PM (Panama)	1876–77	70–98	29	× 4	= 116
<i>Coptic</i> —O&O	1895–1906	120–132	80	× 52	= 4160
<i>Doric</i> —O&O	1895–1906	116–132	94	× 52	= 4888
<i>Gaelic</i> (I)—O&O	1876–83	84–95	64	× 26	= 1664
<i>Gaelic</i> (II)—O&O	1886–1906	107–130	87	× 91	= 7917
<i>Granada</i> —PM (Panama)	1876–82	85–95	47	× 42	= 1974
<i>Great Republic</i> —PM	1876	112–121	84	× 4	= 336
<i>Korea</i> —PM	1902–03	270–292	181	× 19	= 3439
<i>Manchuria</i> —PM	1904–06	262–274	207	× 4	= 828
<i>Mongolia</i> —PM	1905–1906	263–270	155	× 6	= 930
<i>Oceanic</i> —O&O	1876–95	114–135	74	× 85	= 6290
<i>Peru</i> —PM	1892–1902	107–130	80	× 38	= 3040
<i>Siberia</i> —PM	1903	280–306	227	× 11	= 2497

TOTAL: 975 80,523

(Transpacific voyages only: 929)

(Transpacific average crew members only: 78,433)

1. PM = Pacific Mail Steamship Co.; O&O = Occidental & Oriental Steamship Co.

CHART B—1882

Steamship	Round Voyages	Average Chinese Crew	Total Chinese Crew
<i>Arabic</i>	3	× 80	= 240
<i>City of Rio De Janeiro</i>	6	× 85	= 510
<i>City of Tokio</i>	4	× 65	= 260
<i>Colima</i>	5	× 52	= 260
<i>Granada</i>	6	× 47	= 282
<i>City of New York</i>	3	× 57	= 171
<i>City of Peking</i>	4	× 85	= 340
<i>City of Sidney</i>	3	× 60	= 180
<i>Belgic</i> (I)	5	× 60	= 300
<i>Coptic</i>	3	× 80	= 240
<i>Gaelic</i>	5	× 64	= 320
<i>Oceanic</i>	4	× 74	= 296
Total:	51	813	3,399
(Transpacific only: 45)			

To determine the numbers of Chinese seamen in 1882, for example, observe that on any single day, 813 Chinese served the twelve steamships operated by both companies. During the same year, 51 round voyages were completed, thereby producing 3,399 positions for Chinese seamen. Thus, there were 813 at a minimum and 3,399 at a maximum for the year.

CHART C—1888

Steamship	Round Voyages	Average Chinese Crew	Total Chinese Crew
<i>Arabic</i>	2	× 80	= 160
<i>City of Rio De Janeiro</i>	5	× 65	= 325
<i>Colima</i>	3	× 52	= 156
<i>City of New York</i>	4	× 57	= 228
<i>City of Peking</i>	4	× 85	= 340
<i>City of Sidney</i>	4	× 60	= 240
<i>Belgic</i>	4	× 64	= 256
<i>Gaelic</i>	4	× 87	= 348
<i>Oceanic</i>	5	× 74	= 370
Total:	35	624	2,423

Sources: Operating years for the steamships are taken from the books of Port Collector of San Francisco, *Record of Entrances and Clearances for 1876–1914*. Crew sizes are determined directly from available crews' lists and from seamen's pay accounts. On a particular voyage where a Chinese crew list is not available, the number of Chinese crewmen is determined by subtracting the number of Caucasian crewmen listed from the total number of crew members (including officers) as entered in the Port Collector's records.



*The City of Tokio's crew list is one of the few surviving records listing Chinese seamen and their shipboard positions.*

cisco and return, then discharged at the end of the completed voyage. A few additional members were hired in San Francisco. The crew list from each of Pacific Mail's ships was therefore drawn up in Hong Kong, and one copy was kept in the files of the American consul-general. The second and only other copy was surrendered by the ship's captain to the Collector of Customs at the Port of San Francisco on arrival and remained in possession of customs (under the jurisdiction of the Secretary of Treasury). This procedure left the copy at San Francisco the only practical one for informational purposes. Its availability was totally at the disposition of the collector's office, and if it had been misplaced or lost, attempts to secure the remaining copy at Hong Kong would have proven difficult, time-consuming, and conceivably impossible.<sup>9</sup>

The crew lists of the Occidental and Oriental ships were drawn up in Hong Kong under the jurisdiction of the British Colonial Office. It is reasonable to assume that these lists would not have been accessible to an American investigator during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Eventually all lists became archival material, Pacific Mail's ending up at the United States National Archives and Records Service, and Occidental and Oriental's at the Registrar General of Seamen and Shipping, Cardiff, Wales. From the over 900 round-voyages that took place throughout the thirty-year period under study, the only documents with Chinese names preserved for examination are six crews' lists from 1883-1904 and seamen's pay accounts for the years 1875-1877. Many crew lists with Caucasian names do exist, however, and they are those of the officers, most originating at San Francisco.<sup>10</sup>

Officers on both companies' steamships were always Caucasian, with the remaining crew members Chinese, and an examination of available documents show that each steamship carried from 28 to 111 officers and from 29 to 227 Chinese crew members (see Chart A for vari-

ations in Chinese crews). Therefore, the estimated average number of Chinese crew members over the thirty-year period 1876-1906 (average crew members per vessel times total round voyages per vessel) totals 78,433 (see Chart A). With the addition of Chinese crewmen who served on Pacific Mail steamships that plied the Panama route, the average totals 80,523 Chinese who served American merchant shipping.<sup>11</sup>

Unfortunately, obtaining a figure for the total number of individual seamen employed each year for the thirty-year period appears impossible. Some seamen were undoubtedly hired for more than one voyage, but the few remaining number of crews' lists and seamen's pay accounts with Chinese names intact make it impossible to estimate the duplicated count. It is reasonable to assume, however, that a high percentage of seamen were not duplicated because of the following factors: thousands of unemployed seamen were available for hire in China; Hong Kong was a major Asian "free" port that attracted steamships and ships under sail from all over the world; San Francisco was an attractive port of call for many reasons; all crews' lists from the steamships of both companies specify that the Chinese would be discharged at Hong Kong, and, therefore, new crews were hired a short time before the homewardbound voyage (see Chart B notes for possible minimum and maximum numbers in any one year).

What jobs were open to the Chinese seaman and how did he perform his tasks? How did he relate to the ship's officers and how did they relate to him? What were the attitudes toward Asian seamen by their Caucasian counterparts in the maritime service?

Although the 1882 statement by the United States shipping commissioner indicated that Chinese were employed only as "firemen, cooks, waiters, and servants," existing records show Chinese held a much wider assortment of positions, as well as that their numbers were much greater, than previously acknowledged. An available crew's list from 1884 of the steamship *City of*

<div> <div> <small>U.S. CUSTOMS BUREAU, NEW YORK, CHINA</small> </div> <div> <i>China</i> </div> </div> <div> <div> <b>LIST OF PERSONS</b> </div> <div> Comprising the Crew of the </div> <div> <i>"CITY OF TOKIO"</i> </div> <div> of </div> <div> NEW YORK </div> <div> whereof is Master, </div> </div> <div> <i>Jeff. A. Maitre</i> </div> <div> bound for </div> <div> HONG KONG, COLY V. </div>
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Tokio shows the Chinese crew to include two boat-swains, twenty-four seamen, twenty-four firemen, and thirty coal passers, in addition to cooks, stewards, cabin boys, WC boys, mess boys, storekeepers, bakers, porters, pantrymen, and waiters. (Caucasians serving on the same vessel were captain, chief, second and third officers, four engineers, purser, surgeon, clerk, carpenter, three quartermasters, steward, and stewardess.)

When questioned about the performance of Chinese crews, officers for both companies responded with praise. In times of emergency and subsequent tragedy, officers were quick to defend their crews against harsh criticism. On one such occasion, after the collision of 1888 between the *City of Chester*, a small coastwise steamship, and the *Oceanic* in San Francisco Bay, the Chinese crew was charged with disobeying orders. The captain of the ocean liner said in their behalf: "I have yet to see the first instance in which any of my Chinese crew ever refused to obey orders or showed the least panic."<sup>12</sup> In 1902, the captain of Pacific Mail's *China* (II) expressed the general opinion held by officers toward their crews throughout the years:

I have been master now . . . for twenty-eight years, and for the greater part of that time we have had a Chinese crew

in all departments of the ship. I have always found them capable. A man cannot go to sea for twenty-eight years, especially there [on transpacific voyages] without having a great deal of heavy weather, bad weather, and things getting smashed up. In taking in sails and running after things, the Chinese have always been on hand. They are not eye servants at all. They just attend to their own business and trouble nobody else.<sup>13</sup>

G. R. Worcester, former river inspector for Chinese maritime customs and leading British authority on junks and sampans, assessed the competence of Chinese seamen in this way:

The Chinese sailor appears to flourish not only in his own country, but abroad. The emigrating portion of the Chinese maritime population comes, strangely enough, from a relatively small area in the provinces of Kwangtung and Fukien; but wherever they go, they never fail to adapt themselves to their environment, whatever it may chance to be. Some Chinese were employed very successfully as sailors by the early East India-men; so they were initiated to the foreign style of ships and gear a very long time ago. . . . Their courage and skill in navigating and handling their own junks about the China seas is well known. Such work for generations past amid perilous conditions has evolved a hardy race of seamen, whose skill and resourcefulness is second to none in the world.<sup>14</sup>



*The Oceanic (I) opened Occidental and Oriental's new service to Hong Kong in 1875. Her Chinese crew averaged seventy-four persons.*

Even Andrew Furuseth complimented the Chinese sailors' abilities. As labor's most vociferous critic of the policy of employing Chinese seamen, he strove for years to keep them out of American shipping. He nevertheless testified at the 1902 hearing that "vessels have experienced no difficulty in the last forty years in obtaining fairly well-trained seamen in any of the important ports of China."<sup>15</sup> His was the first positive statement made by a union official about Chinese seamen. The general belief had always been mixed: either that the Chinese did not serve as sailors, or if they did, that they could not perform as well as Caucasian sailors, especially in the frequent shipboard emergencies. References over the years to Chinese sailors by unionists and newspaper accounts were usually accompanied with criticism of and reservations about their abilities.<sup>16</sup>

A profound irony can be found in Furuseth's *Second Address to Seamen*, in which he discussed the importance of the deck and engine departments—presumably alluding to white seamen only—and concluded that sailors and firemen were central to the successful operation of a steamship and around which the union's structure should revolve. He also wrote that boatswains "are able seamen assigned to special work. . . . The able seaman is the unit of skill and efficiency in the deck department," and from among such seamen "come the officers and future masters of vessels."<sup>17</sup>

An incident at the famous 1898 battle of Manila Bay proves interesting, considering the dearth of unprejudiced evaluation of the Chinese performance. Fifty Chinese sailors who were recruited for emergency service in the decisive battle were commended by Rear Admiral Dewey for action with "fervor, indifference to danger, devotion to duty, and undivided interest." Dewey later wrote to Washington urging that they be admitted to the United States, but he was referred to the exclusion act which prohibited the landing of Chinese laborers in America.<sup>18</sup>

Chinese crews kept their steamships on rigorous time-

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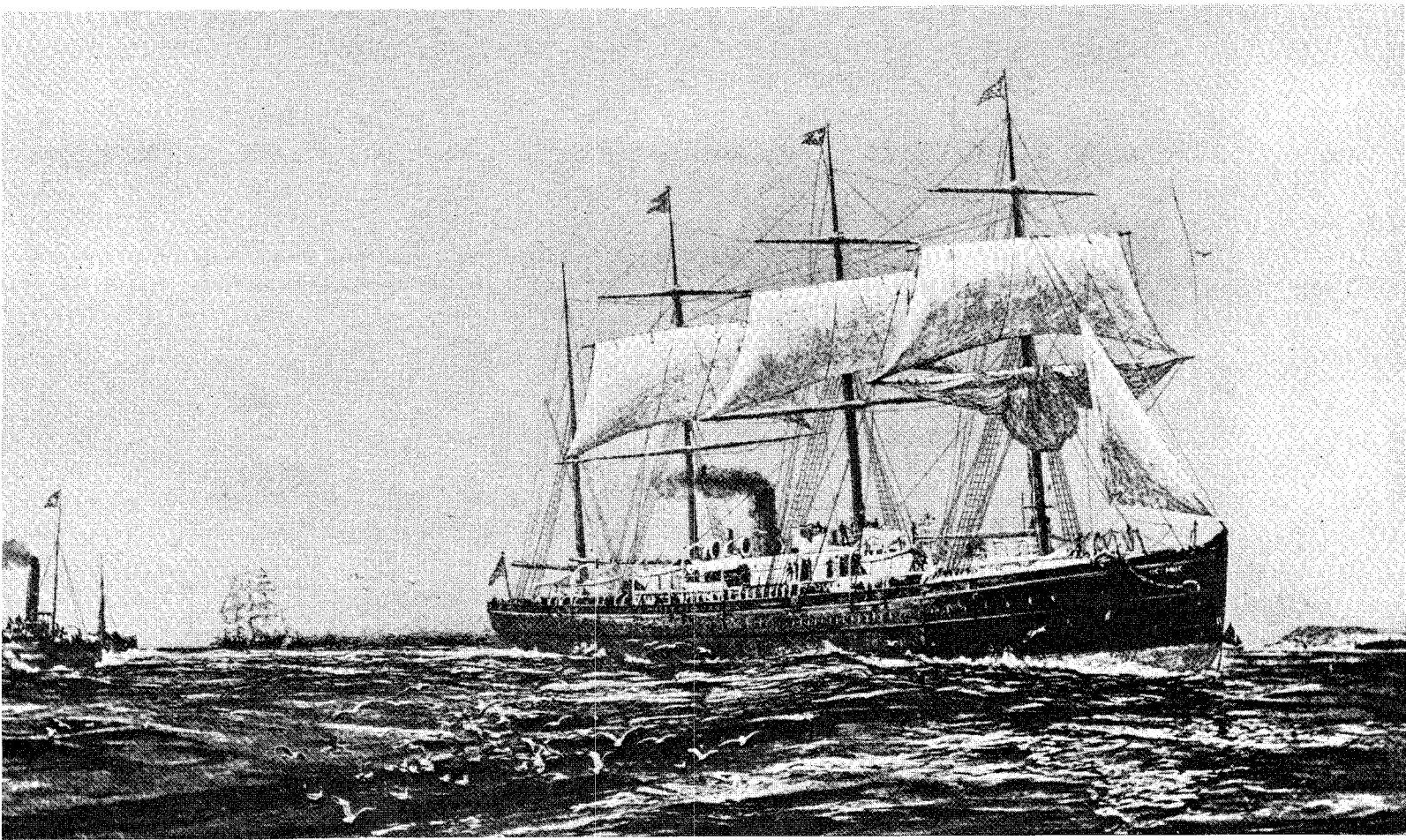
*No merchant ship ever sailed the seas that was so embowered in sentiment as the Oceanic. All the time we had her at San Francisco she was a great favourite of the travelling public and of people who took interest in ships. She was the first modern steamer that floated on the waters of the Bay of San Francisco and even to this day the old mariners speak of her beauty and smart lines. She was just as much of a clipper-ship as she was a steamer. And, oh my, how that ship could sail!—Oceanic Officer W. H. Smalliman*

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tables, and well into the twentieth century the vessels carried clergymen, government representatives, naval officers, merchants, students, and tourists eager to reach their destinations with dispatch. The record steamship crossing of the Pacific was established by the Occidental and Oriental's *Oceanic* in October, 1889, when she passed the whistling buoy at the San Francisco Bar after thirteen days, fourteen hours, and six minutes out of Yokohama.

During the peak years of the Chinese immigration from 1876 to 1890, steamships also carried an estimated 200,000 Chinese to West Coast ports and over one-half that number back to China where they visited or remained. With steerage tickets selling from \$40 to \$50, American and British companies realized over \$11 million in steerage sales alone. Occidental and Oriental's grand *Oceanic* had carried more than 1,000 steerage passengers on a single voyage.<sup>19</sup>

Freight also brought considerable revenue to steamship companies over the years. In 1886 and 1887, for example, Occidental and Oriental carried to the Orient



flour, abalone, barley, beans, beer, beef, pork, grain, leather, liquor, livestock, quicksilver, and treasure (refined silver, Mexican dollars, and jewelry) totalling in receipts \$227,400 and \$234,200. Returning from Asia the ships carried tea, sugar, opium, bamboo, china-ware, coffee, ginger, rattan, silkworm eggs, spices, tobacco, and treasure totalling in receipts \$545,400 and \$519,500.<sup>20</sup>

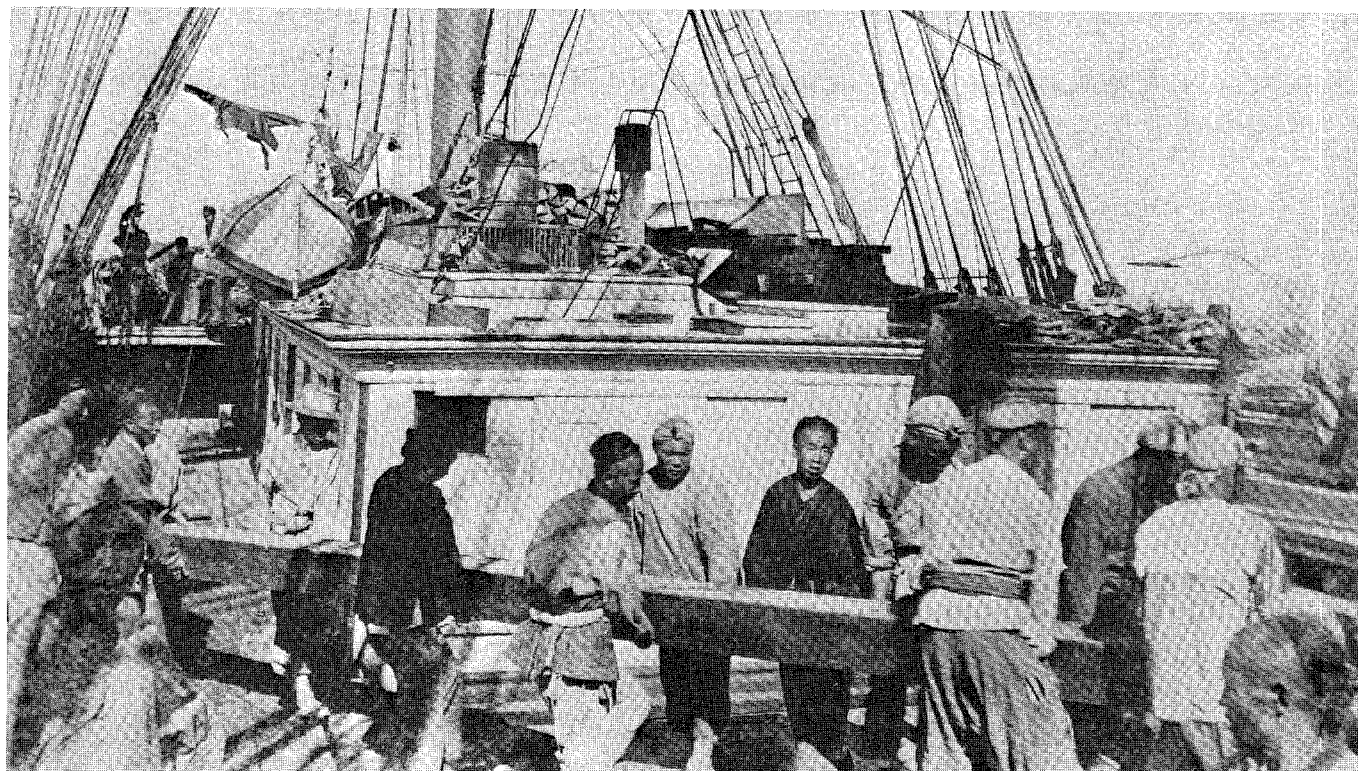
While first-class passengers in a fine merchant vessel such as the *Oceanic* were accorded the most pleasant surroundings and luxurious furnishings possible, including a library, grand piano, and fireplaces, steerage passengers had to contend with large open spaces below decks and inadequate “airing” space allotted them above deck. When voyages became overcrowded in the steerage, conditions were uncomfortable in the extreme:

Thousands applied for transportation (in Hong Kong), but after the space between decks was solidly filled, the ship’s officers declined to receive more for want of room. No fewer than two thousand were turned away the day the ship sailed.

The space assigned to each Chinaman is about as much as is usually occupied by one of the flat boxes in a milliner’s store. It would be a strange sight to one not accustomed to it to see a framework of shelves, not eighteen inches apart, filled with Chinese. If a few barrels of oil were poured into the steerage hold, its occupants would enjoy the distinction, so often objected to, of being literally “packed like sardines.”<sup>21</sup>

Chinese immigration to the United States diminished gradually in the 1880’s after the United States Congress amended the Burlingame Treaty of 1868 and passed the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. It forbade Chinese the right to naturalized citizenship and suspended the immigration of laborers, skilled and unskilled, for a period of ten years.<sup>22</sup> The act culminated a long period of unrest and antagonism toward Chinese laborers, and it was a move which the seamen’s union, as well as other unions, wholeheartedly endorsed. Like most other Caucasian workingmen, seamen believed that the Chinese in American shipping competed unfairly for jobs, and diminished wages and working conditions for sailors everywhere. Between 1876 and 1906, however, wages





for men who labored at sea remained relatively constant, the Chinese being hired out of Hong Kong for \$7 to \$15 (American) per month, while seamen hired out of stateside ports were paid from \$25 to \$55 (American) a month.<sup>23</sup>

Steamship companies such as Pacific Mail and Occidental and Oriental found the Chinese most desirable as competent seamen and as a low-wage labor force. Crews were easy to secure, because the introduction of steam power on China's seas and rivers in the 1860's and 1870's had left thousands of Chinese unemployed. In the same years, shipping at Hong Kong rose steadily, turning the port into a great hiring hall which attracted thousands of seamen. By hiring Chinese seamen, then, Pacific Mail and Occidental and Oriental saved more than \$1,440,000 in wages over a thirty-year period.<sup>24</sup> Throughout this era Pacific Mail defended its hiring policy against repeated attacks by organized labor and politicians and maintained that if it were forced to hire stateside seamen, their higher wages would drive the company out of business. It also claimed that there were not enough Americans available to man its steamships.

Before the 1882 exclusion act which made it illegal to hire non-residents at an American port, Chinese seamen probably maintained complete freedom of

movement in port cities. Sometime after 1884, however, Chinese seamen apparently were required to carry a white tag for identification and permission to move about freely until their vessels departed for the return voyages.<sup>25</sup> Subsequent immigration regulations (requiring, for example, the posting of bonds while ashore) attempted to restrict movement, although the seamen may have been relatively unrestricted until 1888, 1890, or conceivably until the late nineties. The accumulating restrictions promulgated in the late 1890's placed difficult constraints on Chinese seamen and forced the companies to provide living accommodations at their docks.<sup>26</sup> A Postal Subsidy Act in 1891 attempted to regulate the numbers of Chinese crew permitted on board vessels receiving government subsidies for carrying mail.

When a Chinese exclusion convention was convened in 1901 at San Francisco's Metropolitan Temple, Pacific Mail Company again came under attack from the attending politicians and county and labor union representatives. The conference was called principally to petition President Theodore Roosevelt and Congress to extend the expiring exclusion act, and Pacific coast maritime unions urged the convention to support a provision "prohibiting the engagement of Chinese and

*Despite exclusion laws and intense anti-Chinese agitation, Chinese seamen continued to be hired to man American vessels. At the turn of the century the Chinese crew of the Guy C. Goss unloaded lumber at Taku Bar, China.*

other Asiatics in any capacity on any vessel under the American flag.” Pacific Mail’s hiring of Chinese seamen, they claimed, was a violation of the spirit and letter of the first exclusion act, and American ships ought always to be bound by the laws of the United States.<sup>27</sup> They also inferred that Pacific Mail was treated with favoritism. Pacific Mail, for its part, consistently maintained that once a vessel left the continental United States it was outside the jurisdiction of the courts; that Chinese crews hired in Hong Kong for a round voyage remained on shipboard at all times; and, therefore, that the exclusion act did not apply to men on company vessels.<sup>28</sup>

In 1902, Andrew Furuseth conveyed the maritime unions’ position, as formulated at the exclusion convention the preceding year, to a Senate hearing investigating extension of the exclusion act. His testimony on various and largely unsuccessful exclusion measures reveals the difficulty experienced in keeping Chinese seamen from hiring out on American vessels plying the China trade. Furuseth first expressed frustration with the apparently unenforceable Postal Subsidy Act of 1891, which required that vessels in the mail service be American-built and that annually increasing portions of the vessels’ crews be citizens of the United States. Then he gave full support to the proposed Senate Bill 1342, which stated for all ships flying the U.S. flag that:

It shall be unlawful for any vessel not foreign to have or employ in its crew any Chinese person not entitled to admission to the United States, or into the particular territory of the United States to which such vessel plies; and any violation of this provision shall be punishable by a fine not exceeding \$2,000.00.<sup>29</sup>

The act was not passed, but in 1915 the Federal Seamen’s Act, conceived by Furuseth and nursed through the Senate by Robert LaFollette, again attempted to restrict hiring practices on American ships. Crafted as a seamen’s “Emancipation Proclamation” that would attract native-born Americans back into maritime serv-

ice, the act improved working conditions on board ships and attempted to reduce the number of Chinese—and, increasingly, Japanese and Filipino—seamen employed on American vessels. (By 1900, some 80 percent of the nations’ seamen were foreign-born.) The act also established percentage quotas for crews, requiring that annually increasing percentages of seamen on any vessel be able to understand orders given in the English language.<sup>30</sup> Like the earlier exclusion act and exclusion regulations, the seamen’s act increased restrictions on the remaining Chinese sailors in the United States merchant marine.

Prior to the 1882 law, an 1872 act of Congress (Revised Statute 2172) had made it possible for some Chinese seamen to gain United States citizenship, and evidence suggests that several Chinese on each American steamship in the period following the act carried either naturalization or residence papers.<sup>31</sup> Many others jumped ship and entered the country despite immigration restrictions, to the constant and ongoing concern of American immigration officials.<sup>32</sup> It is reasonable to believe, then, that thousands of Chinese sailors would have become American citizens—as sailors from other nationality groups did—had there been no barriers to their immigration.

The report by the shipping commissioner in 1882 that 350 Chinese came under his “official supervision” is especially ironic when the circumstances that precipitated the report are considered. The intent of the Trades Assembly was to reduce significantly or to remove completely the Chinese who were serving shipping and other industries.<sup>33</sup> The commissioner’s report obviously relegated the Chinese involvement to a minor role, similar to the absence of recognition since that time of this unique major contribution to the nation’s shipping industry. The error of the report, the intent of the unions, and the absence of customary documentation resulted finally in the creation of an invisible merchant marine.



The print on page 65 is reproduced from Chatterton's *Steamships and Their Story* (London, 1910). The photograph of the China (II) is from the CHS Library; of the Guy C. Goss on page 66, courtesy the Peabody Museum, Salem, Massachusetts. The photo on page 58 and the list on page 63 are courtesy the author.

## Notes

1. William Martin Camp, *San Francisco: Port of Gold* (New York, 1948), is an example of such bias. Camp does not supply documentation which also presents additional critical problems for the researcher.
2. "Statistical Report of Chinese Employed on the Pacific Coast," *San Francisco Daily Examiner*, January 8, 1882.
3. Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy* (Berkeley, 1971), p. 168, gives credence to the quote. There is an earlier study in *Overland Monthly* (March, 1869), p. 239, that deals with the economic activities of Chinese in California and lists the various occupations Chinese engaged in, but it does not give their numbers. It stated, however, that Chinese served not only as "servants on the Panama steamers," but "as sailors, deck hands, and cabin servants on the China steamers."
4. *Examiner*, August 24, 1888; *Alta California*, October 7, 1888.
5. *Chinese Exclusion Convention, San Francisco, 1901*, p. 111, in the James D. Phelan Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California.
6. Senate, *Report 776*, Chinese Exclusion Hearings, Committee on Immigration, 52 Congress, 1 Session, 1902, 246-48. The Northern Pacific Company was receiving mail compensation from the U.S. Postal Service for carrying the mails on its transpacific runs. The subject of mail compensation was a recurring concern throughout Furuseth's testimony.
7. Two early studies about Pacific steamships and the two companies are: Benjamin C. Cooper, *San Francisco's Ocean Trade: Past and Future—1848-1911* (San Francisco, 1911), and Will Lawson, *Pacific Steamers* (Glasgow, 1927). Basic information for this article on the two companies, however, was supplied by John Kemble's more detailed and exceptional articles: "A Hundred Years of Pacific Mail," *The American Neptune*, April, 1950, and "The Big Four At Sea: The History of the Occidental and Oriental Steamship Company," *Huntington Library Quarterly*, April, 1940. Various records and business papers of Pacific Mail and a few Occidental and Oriental holdings are at the Huntington Library. See also Kemble, *Sidewheelers Across the Pacific* (San Francisco, 1942). The White Star Line was owned by the Oceanic Steam Navigation Co., whose parent organization was Ismay, Imrie, and Company.
8. Kemble, "Big Four at Sea," 346, 350.
9. Record books on the Pacific Mail Company could have provided information at the turn of the century, but the company must have denied access to them because of the controversial nature of its hiring of Chinese crewmen in the period of the Chinese exclusion laws and later pressures to hire fixed percentages of United States citizens for each steamship, as dictated by the Postal Subsidy Act of 1891.
10. The Chinese lists must have been lost, separated as a result of special regulations growing out of the exclusion period, or purposely destroyed through collusion between the collector's office and Pacific Mail. Crews lists at the National Archives and Records Service are: *City of Rio de Janeiro*, November, 1898; *Peru*, May, 1901; *City of Tokio*, December, 1884; *Manchuria*, August, 1904. The Seamen's Pay Accounts are preserved at the Huntington Library. *China* (II) was Pacific Mail's only vessel built outside the United States, and it kept a British registry until 1899. Her crew list for September, 1889, is in the holdings at St. John's University of Newfoundland. Occidental and Oriental's crews lists are difficult to obtain. Although the two companies shared the same dock in San Francisco, they apparently kept separate books, even after the same men controlled both lines. Record books and papers concerning the steamships that were chartered from the White Star Line are minimal, and very little is available. The difficulty in obtaining crews' lists is compounded by the fact that a limited amount of ships' manifests from Occidental and Oriental ships exists as archival material. However, a copy of one list with Chinese names is available—that of the small steamship, *Belgie*, in 1883. It is also in the holdings at St. John's. Occidental and Oriental, unlike Pacific Mail, designated its seamen "AB" for Able Seamen, a universal term for proven experience.
11. This total would appear to be a conservative one. Rather than choose all the years Chinese were hired by Pacific Mail (1867-1915) and Occidental and Oriental (1875-1908), concentration is on 1876-1906, sailings that could be readily substantiated from the records of the Collector of Customs at the Port of San Francisco (National Archives and Records Service). These were the years in which the greatest number of Chinese were hired. Also not included here are the Chinese who served the following routes: transpacific runs operated by J. D. Spreckels & Sons; transpacific runs out of Washington State and San Diego; and ships under sail. These areas will be treated in a subsequent study.

The numbers of Chinese seamen who served American shipping are significant when compared to other occupations where Chinese were found in considerable numbers. In 1869, the peak year of railroad construction, some 10,000 Chinese were employed. In 1881, a successful year for canneries, 3,000 Chinese found work. In the peak era of mining in California, an estimated 9,000 Chinese were at work. In the peak period of cigar-making, 1878-79, 4,000 Chinese were employed.

Once the peak periods passed, however, the numbers of Chinese in these occupations declined considerably, whereas the Chinese involvement at sea was ongoing and cumulative for approximately forty years.

Pacific Mail's coastwise runs after 1882 were not considered due to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act that year. It is reasonable to assume that Pacific Mail had greater difficulty hiring Chinese seamen for that route in succeeding years, and without evidence from crews' lists or wage payments after 1882, inclusion would be pure speculation.

12. *Examiner*, August 28, 1888.
13. Senate, *Report 776*, p. 361.
14. G. R. Worcester, *Sail and Sampan in China* (London, 1966), pp. 26-27.
15. Senate, *Report 776*, p. 244.
16. During the 1890's and 1900's the *Coast Seamen's Journal* was exceptionally vociferous in its sustained attacks on the service of Chinese seamen. Also see *Senate Report 689*, Exclusion Hearings, 1877, pp. 243-44; *Senate Report 776*; *Examiner*, August 24, 1888; Exclusion Convention, 1891, pamphlet.
17. "Second Address to Seamen," Andrew Furuseth Collection at Bancroft Library.
18. *New York Times*, February 23, 1899. About the Chinese performance in the battle, H. H. Bancroft wrote that the Chinese "served faithfully, were efficient, and obedient in service, active and brave in battle, and freely risked their lives in our cause." Nevertheless, Bancroft characterized Dewey's request as a "pathetic plea." Bancroft, *The New Pacific* (1900), p. 595.
19. Figures on steerage earnings are based on the supposition that at least 65 percent of the Chinese who took passage to the United States entered through the Port of San Francisco and at least half that amount returned to China over the years. *Examiner*, August 23, 1888.
20. Also exported from San Francisco were canned foods, clocks, corpses, fish, fishbones, funguses, ginseng, green fruits, groceries, hay, hoofs and horns, hops, lumber, machinery, medicines, oats, oil, old glass, old junk, old metal, paint, potatoes, rubber goods, seaweed, shark fins, shrimps, sinews, soap, vegetables, and wheat. Other items imported from Asia were beans, curios, indigo and gambier, hemp, lacquer, medicines, nut oil, pepper, plants and trees, paper, quicksilver flasks, shells, tapioca, and sage.
21. *Examiner*, August 28, 1888.
22. An excellent study written at the turn of the century dealing with the exclusion acts is Mary R. Coolidge, *Chinese Immigration* (New York, 1909).
23. It was popularly believed that Chinese seamen received \$15 (American) a month, a discrepancy which renders inaccurate many statements made during the seventies and eighties. See *Alta California*, May 3, 1870; *Examiner*, August 24, 1888; *Exclusion Convention*, San Francisco, 1901, p. III.
24. A. Macmillan, *Seaports of the Far East* (London, 1925), p. 212. These savings figures are based on the conservative estimate of 80,000 seamen.
25. *Alta California*, October 7, 1888, explains that before the Scott bill passed (October 1, 1888), it was customary to issue (return) certificates to the Chinese sailors who, when they signed ships articles, were given a white tag, which entitled them to go ashore at pleasure. An exclusion act was passed in 1884 that attempted to tighten up regulations by establishing the "return certificate" based on "prior residence" as being the sole evidence of the right to re-entry.
26. Regulations dealing with the movement of seamen in American ports appeared throughout these years, and four of these developments are listed in Senate, *Report 291*, Regulations, 52 Congress, 1 Session, 1902, pp. 46-47.
27. *Exclusion Convention*, San Francisco, 1901, p. 112.
28. In 1906, Furuseth, acting for the unions, took the company to court, claiming violation of the Chinese Exclusion Act and Alien Contract laws. Although for most purposes a ship with a U.S. registry was considered American territory, the courts held that the exclusion acts did not apply to the hiring of Chinese on American vessels. See *Coast Seaman's Journal*, May 10, 1911.
29. Senate, *Report 776*, p. 246. See also *Report of the Commissioner of Navigation*, 56 Congress, 3 Session, pp. 140-41.
30. Walter MacArthur, *The Seaman's Contract* (San Francisco, 1919), pp. 33, 223.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 5. Surviving crews' lists show that a handful of seamen on each list were not designated to be discharged at Hong Kong, and Captain William Seabury, employed for thirty years by Pacific Mail, commented in the 1902 hearing that some Chinese on his ships had American papers.
32. Reports from the commissioner general of immigration beginning in the 1890's deal at length with "alien seamen" entering the United States illegally on both coasts and the country's borders.
33. Frank Roney, a leading union organizer and president of the Trades Assembly in 1882, commented in his autobiography that he was personally responsible for ordering the compilation of the statistical report on Chinese. He also wrote: "On my suggestion the Trades Assembly issued a call for a Pacific Coast Labor Union Convention to devise the best plan to submit to Congress for the purpose of getting rid of the Chinese. . . . The State had already taken a vote on the subject and had almost unanimously decided that they should be excluded (author's emphasis)." *Autobiography* (Berkeley, 1931), pp. 359-359.



# the Chinese as medical scapegoats in San Francisco, 1870-1905

Much has been written about anti-Chinese sentiment on the West Coast during the 1870's and 1880's, especially the agitation to restrict Chinese immigration into the United States. Little has been said about anti-Chinese prejudice as reflected in the formulation of public health policy on the West Coast. Health policy, however, manifests not only the state of the medical sciences, but the expectations and the value system of society-at-large. In the era when health officials looked to sanitary reform as the primary means of preventing epidemic disease, the presence of an alien population living in substandard quarters was both socially and medically threatening. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the Chinese were to become medical scapegoats; up and down the Pacific coast (and in the Hawaiian Islands) local health officials rationalized the failure of their sanitary programs by tracing all epidemic outbreaks to living conditions among the Chinese. This phenomenon was to last for over thirty-five years. Only after Chinese immigration was finally curtailed, following implementation of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 (and amendments of 1884), and only after scientific research began to unlock the mysteries of disease transmission did medical scapegoatism begin to abate.<sup>1</sup>

The seeds for medical scapegoatism in California first appeared in the 1860's. Whereas in the 1850's the early Chinese immigrants had been admired for their industry and frugality, by the 1860's the Chinese were considered to be "an inferior race" and a "degraded" people.<sup>2</sup> By the 1870's, the racist argument had broadened in scope, and the Chinese were viewed as "a social, moral

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San Francisco's "Three Graces"—malaria, smallpox, and leprosy—stalked the city throughout the '70's and '80's, and health officials incorrectly traced them to Chinatown's "vapors" and crowded conditions.



and political curse to the community.”<sup>3</sup> Specific arguments advanced against the Chinese included: 1) the economic argument, as advocated by nativist and workmen’s groups, that cheap Chinese labor undermined wage rates and adversely affected employment practices on the West Coast; 2) the cultural argument, that the once enlightened Chinese civilization was corrupt and backward and that Chinese immigrants represented the lowest classes in China;<sup>4</sup> 3) the assimilationist argument, that the Chinese did not desire to merge into the American mainstream and, with their “abounding vices” (prostitution, gambling, opium-smoking), were impervious to the “loftier ideals” of Western civilization;<sup>5</sup> 4) the racist argument, that America should maintain a homogenous population and that national degeneration would ultimately result from permitting an inferior race (the Chinese) to mingle with a superior race (the Caucasian);<sup>6</sup> 5) the biological argument, that the Chinese were “inferior in organic structure, in vital force, and in the constitutional conditions of full development”;<sup>7</sup> and, finally, 6) the medical argument, that the Chinese, ignoring all laws of hygiene and sanitation, bred and disseminated disease, thereby endangering the welfare of the state and of the nation.

Commenting in 1900 upon the dominant anti-Chinese mood of the late nineteenth century, Reverend Ira M. Condit, pastor of a Presbyterian Church mission in San Francisco’s Chinatown since 1870, observed as follows:

There seems to be a combination of reasons which breed and keep alive this animosity against our Mongolian brothers. Race antagonism has undoubtedly something to do with it, but the fact that they do not assimilate with us has more. They constitute a foreign substance cast into our social order, which will not mingle, but keeps up a constant irritation. The amount of irritation depends upon the size of the disturbing mass. A few Chinamen would have no perceptible effect. They could be easily digested by the national stomach. . . . But multiply units by millions, and the matter becomes exceedingly serious. Hence the fear of their

pouring in upon us in overwhelming crowds has had much to do with our attitude toward them.<sup>8</sup>

In 1900 when Reverend Condit was writing about the Chinese, anti-Japanese sentiment had also made its appearance on the West Coast. However, because the high tide of Japanese immigration was to occur many years after that of the Chinese, a tradition of using the Japanese as medical scapegoats never developed. Advances in medical knowledge about the causation and transmission of epidemic disease had made any arguments along this line intellectually indefensible. Instead, the Japanese were accused of having an excessively high birth rate, an argument never advanced against the Chinese. (The Japanese arrived in the United States as family units, or male immigrants imported “picture brides”; Chinese immigrants, on the other hand, were largely male laborers who left their wives or families behind in China.)<sup>9</sup> While the Japanese never became medical scapegoats, they were at times subject to discriminatory action, such as during the bubonic plague scare of 1900–1904. This paper, then, will focus on the Chinese as medical scapegoats, dealing specifically with the situation as it existed in San Francisco from the year 1870, when the city’s Board of Health was reorganized, to 1905, when public health officials concluded their five-year battle against bubonic plague in the Chinatown area.

**B**y 1870, San Francisco had the largest concentration of Chinese in California—24.4 percent of the state’s Chinese population.<sup>10</sup> Although they comprised 5 percent of the total population of San Francisco, only a token number were admitted into the health facilities operated by the city and county.<sup>11</sup> In 1870, the primary municipal facilities were the Almshouse, built in 1867 and located on eighty acres near Lake Honda (site of

the present Laguna Honda Home), and City Hospital, built in 1854 and located on Francisco and Stockton streets. Chinese patients were shunted off to a smallpox (or "pest") hospital or to a special building, originally operated exclusively for the Chinese and later designated as the Lazaretto or Lepers' Quarters. Both of these facilities were located at Twenty-Sixth and Army streets, near the site of the future City and County Hospital (opened in 1872).

In 1870, the San Francisco Board of Health was reorganized as a distinct political unit with considerable power within the city. Composed of the mayor and four physicians appointed by the governor of California, the board supervised the administration of the city hospitals, the jail, the correctional school (the industrial school), and the quarantine system for the harbor. It also appointed a city health officer (also a physician) who was to oversee health and sanitary conditions within San Francisco.<sup>12</sup> While these physicians were theoretically chosen from among the best trained members of the profession, the range of municipal problems with which they were confronted was often beyond the scope of their medical expertise. Thus, the pronouncements of the board and the health officer were often characterized by political or social expedience, rather than by scientific insight. Beginning in the 1870's, they were to credit Chinatown with introducing and disseminating every epidemic outbreak to hit San Francisco. In the words of one astute physician writing in 1876: "The Chinese were the focus of Caucasian animosities, and they were made responsible for mishaps in general. A destructive earthquake would probably be charged to their account."<sup>13</sup>

The line of attack used by health officers against the Chinese was directly related to the medical theories of the period. According to the miasmatic theory of disease popular in the 1870's, epidemic outbreaks were caused either by the state of the atmosphere or by poor sanitary conditions affecting the local atmosphere. China-

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*Pronouncements by the board of health . . . were often characterized by political or social expedience, rather than by scientific insight.*

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town, with its "foul and disgusting vapors," was regarded as the primary source of atmospheric pollution within the city. Numerous citations were issued by the health authorities for such sanitary offenses as "generating unwholesome odors," improper disposal of garbage, faulty construction of privy vaults and drains, and failure to clean market stalls.<sup>14</sup> When a virulent smallpox epidemic struck San Francisco in 1875-76, the city health officer ordered every house in Chinatown to be thoroughly fumigated. Nevertheless, the epidemic raged on, resulting in some 1,646 reported cases with 405 deaths among the white population of San Francisco.<sup>15</sup> Unable to account for the severity of the epidemic, the city health officer, J. L. Meares, offered the following explanation:

I unhesitatingly declare my belief that the cause is the presence in our midst of 30,000 (as a class) of unscrupulous, lying and treacherous Chinamen, who have disregarded our sanitary laws, concealed and are concealing their cases of smallpox.<sup>16</sup>

To the sanitarians of the 1870's, Chinatown was more than a slum. It was "a laboratory of infection," peopled by "lying and treacherous" aliens who had minimal regard for the health of the American people.

The general acceptance of the germ theory in the 1880's did little to dispel the popular belief that epidemic outbreaks were directly attributable to conditions within Chinatown. As before, medical theorization was inseparably linked with social attitudes and prejudices.

The "germ" theory of disease is now an acknowledged fact





in the science of medicine. . . . This theory teaches us that material like cloth, tobacco, food, if exposed to the atmosphere charged with those germs, is infected by them, and thus detrimental to the health of the wearer or consumer of such merchandise. The dangerous result of such evil, we hold, is practically proven by the ravages of diseases like diphtheria, etc., in this city, irrespective of time, season or places. The physician who tries to trace the source of the infection is mostly always unable to do so, and we believe that the existing evils in Chinatown are the proper source.<sup>17</sup>

By 1880 criticism of conditions in Chinatown had become so widespread that the Board of Health, responding to political pressure, issued a resolution formally condemning Chinatown as a "nuisance."

The Chinese cancer must be cut out of the heart of our city, root and branch, if we have any regard for its future sanitary welfare . . . with all the vacant and health territory around this city, it is a shame that the very centre be surrendered and

abandoned to this health-defying and law-defying population.

We, therefore, recommend that the portion of the city here described be condemned as a nuisance; and we call upon the proper authorities to take the necessary steps for its abatement without delay.<sup>18</sup>

Proposals to quarter the Chinese outside of the city limits of San Francisco were advanced at this time, primarily under the sponsorship of the Anti-Chinese Council of the Workingmen's party. Similar proposals had been set forth since the 1850's and would recur again in the 1890's and at the time of the bubonic plague crisis in the early 1900's.<sup>19</sup> However, no formal condemnation proceedings were ever instituted, and Chinatown remained located in the center of San Francisco. This central location brought the Chinese into daily contact with the Caucasian population of the city and was a



*A virulent smallpox epidemic in the mid-1870's claimed the lives of 1000 Chinese, making street funerals a commonplace sight.*

constant source of irritation to many San Franciscans. To one city health officer, Chinatown was "the moral purgatory" through which all who pass come out nauseated and disgusted, and perchance defiled by Mongolian filth or disease.<sup>20</sup>

Sanitarians and politicians were especially concerned about the large number of so-called "courtesans" who operated in the Chinatown area. These prostitutes were believed to be infected with a particularly virulent form of syphilis that was almost impossible to cure. Testifying before the congressional committee investigating conditions in Chinatown in 1877, Dr. H. H. Toland (founder of the Toland Medical College, subsequently the University of California Medical School) reported that nine-tenths of the venereal disease in San Francisco could be traced back directly to Chinese prostitutes. Since it was believed that most of the Chinese houses of prostitution were patronized primarily by whites, Chinese prostitution was seen as "the source of the most terrible pollution of the blood of the younger and rising generations." In his testimony, Dr. Toland stated unequivocally that he had never heard or read of any country in the world where there were so many syphilitic young men as in San Francisco.<sup>21</sup>

An equal source of consternation to the medical community—and to the general public—was the presence of lepers in the Chinatown area. Apparently, by 1875 a number of lepers of particularly "loathsome appearance" had drifted to San Francisco from throughout the state. While some sought treatment at the Twenty-Sixth Street Lazaretto, the majority were presumed to be hidden in the "subterranean dens" of Chinatown. During the 1870's and early 1880's, little was known about the etiology of leprosy. It was presumed to be hereditary, contagious, incurable, more common in the male than female, and likely to disappear with hygienic improvement.<sup>22</sup> To one city health officer, leprosy among the Chinese was "simply the result of generations of syphilis, transmitted from one generation to an-

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*In 1878 and again in 1883, health authorities descended on Chinatown, ferreted out the lepers, and placed them in the 26th Street Lazaretto with the intention of sending them back to China at the first opportunity.*

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other."<sup>23</sup> Another view held that leprosy was inherent in the Chinese and infused into the Caucasian race by the smoking of opium pipes previously handled by Chinese lepers.<sup>24</sup> As early as 1871, the Chinese were accused of introducing "the dread scourge" of Mongolian leprosy to the West Coast. In 1876, an amendment to the general police law of California made it unlawful for persons afflicted with leprosy to live in ordinary intercourse with the population of the state and provided that such persons "be compelled to inhabit lazarettos or lepers' quarters."<sup>25</sup> In 1878 and again in 1883, health authorities descended on Chinatown, ferreted out the lepers, and placed them in the Twenty-Sixth Street Lazaretto with the intention of sending all Mongolian lepers back to China at the first opportunity. Of the 128 lepers admitted to the Lazaretto from July, 1871, to April, 1890, 115 were classified as "Mongolians" and 83 of the total number were ultimately shipped back to China.<sup>26</sup>

Except for cases of leprosy, deportation on medical grounds was not a common procedure during the nineteenth century. Rather, immigration officials attempted to prevent the entry into this country of persons suspected of carrying contagious disease. Regulations for reporting infectious disease on incoming vessels had existed since the 1850's. By 1870, shipmasters entering San Francisco harbor were required to report to the quarantine official of San Francisco all cases of Asiatic cholera, smallpox, yellow fever, typhus,



and "ship fever."<sup>27</sup> Increasingly, the fear was expressed that the Chinese in particular were carriers of alien disease that would cause the physiological decay of the American nation.<sup>28</sup> In May, 1873, the San Francisco Board of Health passed a resolution whereby all vessels arriving from China were required to come to anchor in the Bay and all passengers were to be subjected to a personal examination by the quarantine officer.<sup>29</sup>

Generally, quarantine of incoming passengers was laxly enforced during the 1870's. However, with the acceptance of the germ theory in the 1880's, efforts were intensified to prevent the importation of foreign germs into this country. A regulation of the San Francisco Board of Health, dated June, 1884, specified that all vessels arriving from Asiatic ports must be detained for inspection, fumigation, and disinfection.<sup>30</sup> Another measure, dated July, 1884, specified the method of inspection to be used for all vessels arriving from Asian ports.

The Quarantine Officer and his assistants shall make an examination of every part of the vessel into which they can enter. . . . Two or more inspectors shall, after all the Chinese steerage passengers have been brought on the upper deck, commence at the extreme rear portion of each deck . . . and proceeding forward, examine every compartment, state-room, storeroom . . . driving all Chinese steerage passengers they may find on the upper deck. When the inspection of the vessel is completed, the Quarantine Officer shall come on deck, and, with the aid of his assistants, shall count the Chinese passengers, men, women and children separately. The white passengers and crew must be mustered and counted first.<sup>31</sup>

Until the 1890's, quarantine of incoming vessels was generally a state function. The National Quarantine Act of 1873 had empowered the surgeon general of the United States Marine Hospital Service to enforce port quarantine only if he did not interfere with the laws and procedures of the states involved.<sup>32</sup> However, with the passage of the quarantine law of February 15, 1893, the United States Marine Hospital Service was given direct responsibility for administration of port quaran-

tine. (With the implementation of this law came a series of jurisdictional disputes between the quarantine officer of San Francisco and officers of the Marine Hospital Service. These disputes, which lasted into the early years of the twentieth century, often hampered the effective administration of quarantine procedures.) In 1894, bubonic plague was reported in Canton and Hong Kong, and within a short span of time, the disease spread throughout the port cities of the Far East. In 1896, the San Francisco Board of Health declared the ports of Yokohama, Kobe, Shanghai, and Hong Kong to be "infected" with bubonic plague. Under the board's ruling of December 16, 1896, all Chinese and Japanese passengers, together with their baggage and portable effects, were to be remanded to the city's quarantine station.<sup>33</sup> While all passengers ostensibly were subject to inspection, only Asiatics were subject to detention. Through these procedures, health officials hoped to protect American shores from that ancient enemy of man—the bubonic plague.

**B**y 1900, scientific investigators were hard at work trying to pinpoint the mechanism whereby bubonic plague was transmitted from one individual to another. Although the plague bacillus had been isolated in 1894 and the role of the rat as a carrier of the disease had long been suspected, the actual transmission of the disease through fleas—first suggested in 1897—was as yet an unconfirmed theory. Numerous views existed in the medical press as to the possible causes of plague transmission; drinking or eating contaminated food, respiration of contaminated air, and inoculation through skin abrasion were popularly held views. Because the plague had never occurred on the North American continent, many local physicians expressed doubts about the possibility of an epidemic on the West Coast:

*Repeatedly invading Chinatown in the 1890's, health officials destroyed buildings suspected to be sources of disease. In this newspaper illustration, an officer "surveys with satisfaction" the "demolishing of the Den of Filth at 832 Jackson."*



In America . . . and in the enlightened countries of Europe under the improved sanitary conditions of progressive civilization, there need be no apprehension of a repetition of the horrors of the past. It is well known that the disease will not long exist in the absence of squalor, uncleanness, overcrowding and insufficient air and sunlight.<sup>34</sup>

This optimistic attitude proved to be short lived. In December, 1899, two cases of bubonic plague were reported in Honolulu's Chinatown. Measures were immediately instituted by the Hawaiian Board of Health to depopulate the area and to burn infected houses. Ultimately, 4500 Chinese were removed to a quarantine camp, and the Chinese quarter was totally burned.<sup>35</sup> Meanwhile, health officials from the Marine Hospital Service suspected that plague also existed on the West

Coast. Two probable cases had occurred in San Francisco as early as November, 1898, but because of inadequate bacteriological examinations, no official diagnosis of plague was ever made. In June, 1899, a Japanese steamer arrived in San Francisco harbor and reported three deaths from bubonic plague while at sea. Federal health officials realized that it was just a matter of time before an epidemic struck San Francisco.

Then, on March 6, 1900, the body of a deceased Chinese male was removed from the basement of a hotel in Chinatown. Because the deceased had not been under the care of a licensed physician at the time of death, an autopsy was required before a burial permit would be issued by the city. The autopsy revealed enlarged lymph nodes, and bubonic plague was consid-



ered the probable cause of death. One day later, on March 7, city authorities placed a rope cordon around Chinatown in an attempt to close off some 14,000 Chinese from contact with the white population of the city. On March 9, Chinatown was temporarily released from quarantine, but guards were placed at each point of exit from the city to examine all Chinese attempting to leave the city by rail or by ferry and to detain all persons with symptoms of plague. At the same time, a house-to-house inspection of Chinatown was ordered. Sewers and dwellings were disinfected with sulfur dioxide and bichloride of mercury. Within the next months, the quarantine was reinstated, and every house in the district, "except those inhabited by the wealthy and usually clean Chinese," was washed from garret to cellar with a caustic disinfectant. Household goods were removed and aired in the streets for one to three days, and all cellars and basements were thoroughly whitewashed.<sup>36</sup>

Meanwhile, a "medico-political" scandal was brewing. The governor of California, Henry T. Gage, and executives of big business and of the large railroads, in conjunction with the San Francisco Board of Trade, the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, and the Merchants Association, were all determined to prove that the plague did not exist in San Francisco. According to one historian, "They did not wish the world to know that San Francisco harbored the Black Death. Such news was bad, for business and capital, always timid and jumpy, were fearful of sick rats and Chinamen."<sup>37</sup> On the other hand, the San Francisco Board of Health and the Marine Hospital Service declared that the plague existed in San Francisco and determined to institute preventive measures such as quarantine, mass vaccination, and possibly depopulation and destruction of Chinatown.<sup>38</sup> On March 22, the president of the San Francisco Board of Health issued a statement declaring that the Chinese quarter was infected with plague, that the Chinese were concealing cases of the disease, and that

local newspapers were suppressing news of the plague. Shortly thereafter, quarantine measures against California were announced by the states of Texas and Colorado; ultimately, quarantine procedures were instituted by Louisiana, the Hawaiian Island, British Columbia, Mexico, and Ecuador.<sup>39</sup>

Two months later, on May 21, 1900, the surgeon general of the Marine Hospital Service, Dr. Walter Wyman, requested authority from President William McKinley to issue regulations regarding interstate travel by Asians. Under the law of March 27, 1890, the following powers had been granted to the presidency:

Whenever it shall be made to appear to the satisfaction of the President that cholera, yellow-fever, or plague exists in any State or Territory . . . he is hereby authorized to cause the Secretary of the Treasury to promulgate such rules and regulations as in his judgment may be necessary to prevent the spread of such disease from one State or Territory into another. . . . The said rules and regulations shall be prepared by the Supervising Surgeon General of the Marine Hospital Service under the direction of the Secretary of the Treasury.<sup>40</sup>

Authority to regulate travel was granted by the secretary of the treasury on May 22, and the following regulations were adopted:

The surgeon general of the Marine Hospital Service is authorized to forbid the sale or donation of transportation by common carrier to Asians or other races particularly liable to the disease.

No common carrier shall accept for transportation any person suffering with plague or any article infected therewith. . . .

The body of any person who has died of plague shall not be transported except in hermetically sealed coffins and by consent of the local health office.<sup>41</sup>

Chinese and Japanese were refused the right to leave the state without possession of certificates of Haffkine prophylactic vaccination from the Marine Hospital Service. The Marine Hospital Service placed inspectors at Reno, Nogales, Needles, Yuma, Ashland, and the Oregon border to check on departing Asians.<sup>42</sup> Simul-

CITIZENS' HEALTH COMMITTEE OF SAN FRANCISCO  
TO ALL HOUSEHOLDERS

# KILL THE RATS

**TRAPS:** The best trap for dwellings, stores, etc., is the large cage trap.

**BAIT:** To be changed daily between cheese, fish heads, chicken heads, fried bacon, fresh liver and pine nuts.

Bait to be tied on inner side of top of trap.

Smoke the trap after handling and before setting again for other rats.

Cover the trap except entrance with sacking.

Place trap near usual feeding place of rat.

Snap traps are best in butcher shops, bakeries and restaurants.

Bait should be tied on.

**POISON:** All druggists can furnish a good rat poison. Follow directions. Place in rat holes, beneath floors and in covered places. **DO NOT PLACE WHERE ACCESSIBLE TO CHILDREN.**

**DISPOSITION OF RATS:** On delivery of dead or trapped Rats at any Health Station, (see reverse side,) a bounty of 10c. per Rat will be paid. Rats should be carried to Station in closed tin boxes or cans.

**IF NOT CONVENIENT TO TAKE RATS TO HEALTH STATION, TELEPHONE TO NEAREST STATION AND RATS WILL BE CALLED FOR AND BOUNTY PAID BY INSPECTOR ANSWERING CALL.**

(OVER)

EXHIBIT B (FACE). TWO HUNDRED AND SEVENTY THOUSAND OF THESE CARDS WERE DISTRIBUTED. THEY WERE ONE OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE CIRCULARS.

*Rat-proofing became a central concept in plague-control after 1900. Information leaflets were widely distributed in the city, and captured rats were inspected for disease at the city "ratatorium."*

ommended. . . . Seven thousand Chinese must be moved before Chinatown can be cleansed. Citizens committee has over \$40,000 subscribed for quarantining these people. Am trying to obtain use Mission Rock warehouse for detention camp. This will house 1,500.<sup>44</sup>

However, on June 7, the circuit court refused to allow implementation of the detention plan. Similarly, on June 15 the court ordered the quarantine of Chinatown lifted.

Only a few cases of plague were reported in the summer and fall of 1900, but the Hospital Service remained adamant that something must be done. Meanwhile, the governor and his business cronies continued to deny the existence of plague in California. Surgeon J. H. White, chief of the division of domestic quarantine within the United States Marine Hospital Service, suggested that the testimony of the best bacteriologists in America was needed to confirm or deny the diagnosis of plague. In January, 1901, Secretary L. J. Gage of the Treasury Department appointed a commission of experts consisting of Professors Simon Flexner of the University of Pennsylvania, F. G. Novy of the University of Michigan, and L. F. Barker of the University of Chicago. The commission found that plague did in reality exist in San Francisco.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the governor and his appointees on the State Board of Health continued to oppose all plague-control efforts and refused to allow inspection of other California cities where plague was rumored to exist. In San Francisco, Mayor Eugene Schmitz refused to approve the printing of health reports and vital statistics and even attempted to remove from office four members of the Board of Health who persisted in stating that plague existed in San Francisco.<sup>46</sup> Not until a new governor, George Pardee, a practicing physician and former member of the Oakland Board of Health, was inaugurated in 1903 was any real progress made towards plague control in California.

Meanwhile, in February, 1903, the San Francisco Board of Health augmented its policy of fumigation and

taneously, the Southern Pacific Railroad ceased selling tickets to Asiatics.<sup>43</sup>

These drastic procedures proved short-lived, however. On May 28, the United States circuit court in San Francisco, acting on a petition from the Chinese Six Companies, ruled against the travel regulations adopted by the Marine Hospital Service.

Next, federal health officials attempted to create a detention camp for the quarantine of Asiatics. The following telegraph message from J. J. Kinyoun, federal quarantine officer for San Francisco, to the surgeon general of the U.S. Marine Hospital Service in Washington, D.C., was sent on June 4:

Have learned from local board, Secretary of War consents use of Angel Island for detention camp. China Cove rec-



*Herbalists, pharmacists, and acupuncturists  
operating in the classical tradition  
provided most of the medical care available  
in California's Chinatowns.*

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*Chinatown was popularly viewed  
as "a laboratory of infection."*

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disinfection by ordering the extermination of rats in the Chinatown area through use of traps and poison. In addition, garbage collection in the area was to be expedited, and the streets of Chinatown were to be swept thoroughly three times a week and flushed with water once a week.<sup>47</sup> That spring, the State Board of Health passed a resolution recommending the removal of Chinatown from its central location in the heart of the city, noting that the presence of "a large alien and unassimilable population" was a "constant menace" to the health, commerce, and industries of the city, the state, and the nation at large.<sup>48</sup> Recognizing that fire could not safely be employed in ridding San Francisco of its "pest-hole," as had been done in Honolulu, the state board proposed that the area be razed and that the ground be saturated with a liberal treatment of chloride of lime and carbolic acid.

The following year, less drastic methods were recommended. On February 6, 1904, the State Board of Health, the San Francisco Board of Health, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors, and the Marine Hospital Service passed the following joint resolution:

RESOLVED, That all cellars, basements, and underground places in the district between California and Pacific, Stockton, and Kearny, be condemned as places of abode and the same be destroyed; that in case of reconstruction, the owners be required to remove surface soil and to concrete the area thus exposed solidly from wall to wall.<sup>49</sup>

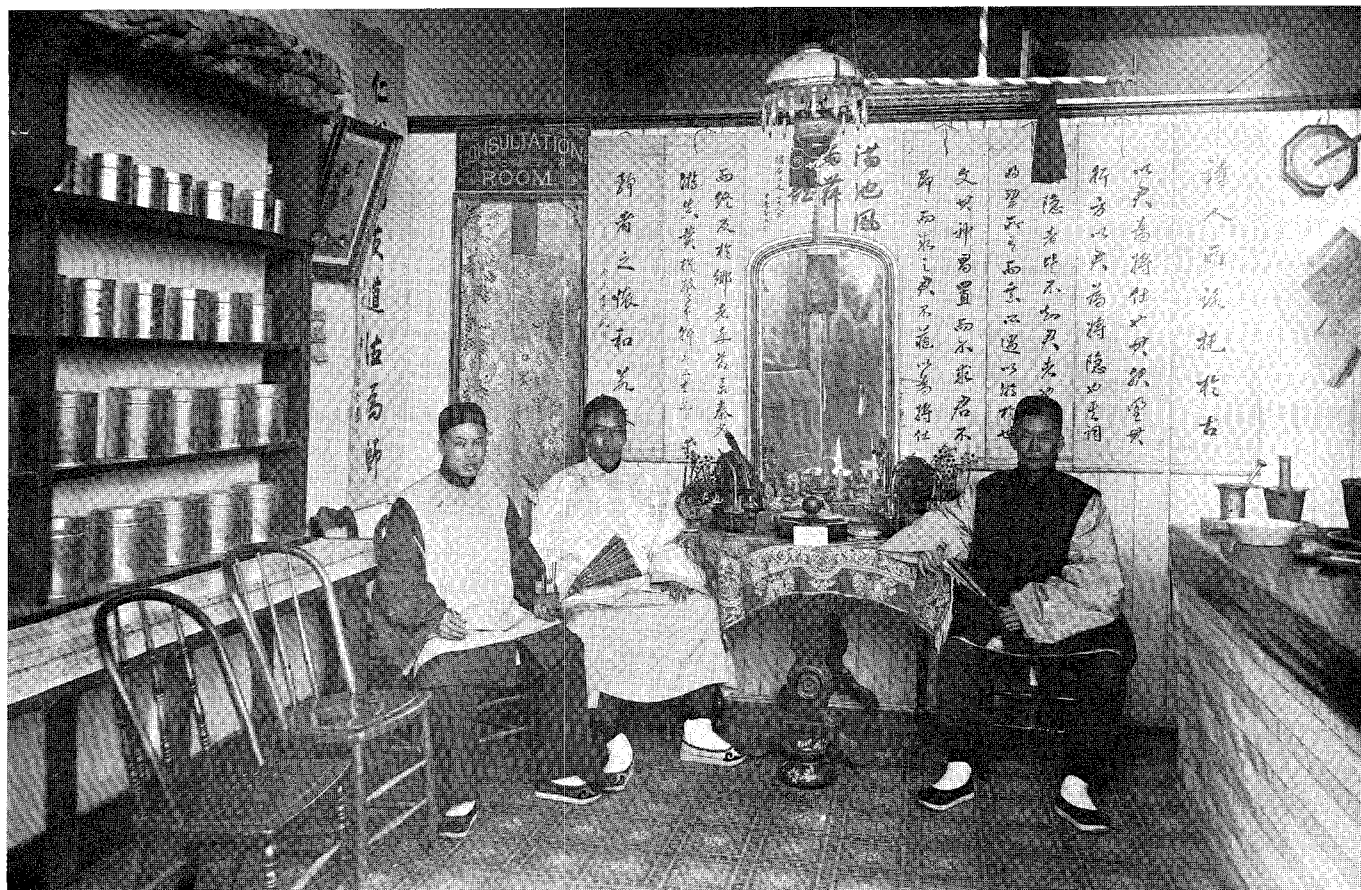
Thus began one of the first recorded attempts to control the spread of plague through rat-proofing. By the end of June, 1904, all wooden basement flooring in some twenty-two city blocks had been totally destroyed.

The last case of human plague in this first outbreak was reported on February 29, 1904; plague control

measures continued until April, 1905. Altogether, 121 cases of plague were disclosed, with a death rate of 118. The vast majority of the victims were Chinese. This episode is notable because of the persistent belief by local, state, and national officials that bubonic plague, as it existed in the United States, was limited to persons of Asiatic origin.<sup>50</sup> As noted in a publication of that time, bubonic plague was "an Oriental disease, peculiar to rice-eaters."<sup>51</sup>

Then, in April, 1906, came the great San Francisco earthquake and fire. The ground shock broke open sewers and scattered debris from the ruined buildings everywhere. Thousands of homeless were temporarily housed in "wooden tents" and other flimsy shelters or in large camps under the direction of the Red Cross. Uncovered holes in the earth served as latrines; garbage was stored haphazardly, often in uncovered receptacles, or dumped in vacant lots. The rat population in the city flourished, and simultaneously, fleas became unusually prevalent throughout the city.<sup>52</sup>

This was the setting for the second outbreak of bubonic plague in San Francisco. Yet nobody expected the plague to recur, and when the first case was reported in May, 1907, the public was incredulous. From May, 1907, to March, 1908, 167 cases of plague were reported with a total of 89 deaths. Of the total cases reported, only 8 of the victims were Chinese.<sup>53</sup> During this second epidemic, however, there were no attempts to deny the existence of plague in San Francisco nor attempts to conceal cases of the disease. Whereas the role of the rat and its ectoparasites had not been fully understood at the time of the first epidemic outbreak in 1900, by 1907 the concept was routinely accepted by public health officials. A citywide campaign was organized to rid San Francisco of its rat population, and the public enthusiastically supported the formation of a Citizens' Health Committee which worked in conjunction with federal officers and with the local and state boards of health. Buildings throughout the city were ratproofed, proce-



dures for trapping and poisoning of rats were initiated, and the quarantine of incoming and outgoing ships was effectively administered. Of significance, the epidemic outbreak was not traced back to the presence of the Chinese in San Francisco; medical scapegoatism had been rendered obsolete by the improved public health measures.

**A**nother aspect of the story of the Chinese as medical scapegoats in San Francisco is the effect of public health policy upon the Chinese community itself. Throughout the nineteenth century, city officials were reluctant to finance any health services for the Chinese population even though Chinatown was popularly viewed as “a laboratory of infection.” Early Chinese immigrants realized the necessity of banding together and providing for their own health care needs. In the 1850’s they first grouped together into associations based upon loyalty to clan (family associations) or place of origin (district associations). In the 1860’s, the district associations fed-

erated into the Chung Wah Kung Saw, which later became known as the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association, or the Chinese Six Companies. During this period, each of the district associations maintained a small “hospital” in San Francisco for use by their aged or ailing members, a facility usually consisting of little more than a few bare rooms furnished with straw mats.<sup>55</sup> The existence of these hospitals was in direct violation of city health codes, but local officials allowed them to operate. In fact, during the leprosy scare of the 1870’s, health officers ruled that lepers should be “debarred from hospital maintenance” at city expense and that “the Chinese companies should be compelled to maintain them and send them back to China.”<sup>56</sup> Thus, from August, 1876, to October, 1878, known lepers were housed in the so-called Chinese “hospitals”; thereafter, health authorities ruled that all lepers were to be isolated in the Twenty-Sixth Street hospital.

Not only were local authorities ambivalent about admitting Chinese patients to municipal facilities, but they also were hesitant about providing sanitary services within the Chinatown area. Dr. A. B. Stout, a promi-



# ADMISSIONS TO ALMSHOUSE, 1871-1886

Year	Total Patients Under Care <sup>1</sup>	Chinese Patients Under Care <sup>2</sup>
1871	626	2
1872	628	0
1873	603	1
1874	713	2
1875	832	0
1876	763	2
1877	960	4
1878	913	1
1879	938	1
1880	1,066	0
1881	1,103	0
1882	1,045	1
1883	1,008	0
1884	1,060	0
1885	1,110	0
1886	1,034	0

<sup>1</sup> Compiled from annual *Municipal Reports*, listings of admissions to Alms house.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Patients not separated according to race in listings of admissions. Figures based on country of birth.

nent physician and member of the California Board of Health, testified before a congressional investigating committee in 1877 that "the city authorities undertake to clean the city in other parts, but the Chinese are left to take care of themselves and clean their own quarter at their own expense."<sup>57</sup>

Whenever a major epidemic threatened San Francisco, however, health officials descended upon Chinatown with a vengeance. During the smallpox epidemic of 1876-1877, for instance, city health officer J. L. Meares bragged that not only had he ordered every house in Chinatown thoroughly fumigated, "but the whole of the Chinese quarter was put in a sanitary condition that it had not enjoyed for ten years."<sup>58</sup> Similar comments were made at the time of the bubonic plague in 1900-1901 when nearly every house in the district was disinfected and fumigated.

In the nineteenth century medical care in Chinatown was largely provided by herbalists and pharmacies in the classic tradition of Chinese medicine. As late as 1900, no Chinese physicians appear to have been licensed to practice medicine in the state of California; in fact, not until 1908 was the Medical Department of the University of California in San Francisco to graduate a physician of Chinese origin.<sup>59</sup> Some Chinese of the merchant class did seek treatment from Caucasian physicians, usually for surgical care not available from Chinese practitioners.<sup>60</sup> In the 1880's a few church missions in Chinatown also began offering the services of white female physicians for pediatric and obstetrical care. Throughout the nineteenth century, however, the vast majority of Chinese were unwilling to consult Caucasian doctors because, as one historian has noted, "the language barriers, the higher fees, and strange medications and methods were too much to assimilate."<sup>61</sup>

The reluctance on the part of the Chinese to seek medical attention outside of Chinatown accounted in part for their low admission rate to the San Francisco City and County Hospital and to the Alms house during

the last century (for statistics on admissions, see tables). An examination of the statistics on admissions to the city and county hospital for the years 1870-1897 reveals that less than .1 percent of the hospital inpatients were of Chinese origin, whereas the Chinese population in the city varied from 5 to 11 percent of the total population. Statistics on admissions to the Alms house disclose an even lower admission rate: of 14,402 admissions from 1871 to 1886, only 14 cases were of Chinese origin.

Obviously, the low admission rate of the Chinese to municipal facilities cannot be attributed entirely to reluctance to seek Western-style care. An 1881 article in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, headlined "No Room for Chinese: They are Denied Admission to the County Hospital," referred to a resolution of the Board of Health, adopted several years earlier, that had essentially closed City and County Hospital to Chinese patients.<sup>62</sup> The article pointed out that in the fall of 1881 the Chinese consul had petitioned the Board of Health on behalf of an ailing Chinese immigrant who desired to gain ad-

# ADMISSIONS TO SAN FRANCISCO CITY AND COUNTY HOSPITAL, 1870-1897

YEAR	TOTAL S. F. POPULATION <sup>1</sup>	CHINESE POPULATION <sup>2</sup>	% CHINESE IN S. F. POPULATION	HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS <sup>3</sup>	"YELLOW" PATIENTS <sup>4</sup>		NATIVITY	
					NO. ADMITTED	NO. DEATHS	CHINA	JAPAN
1870	170,250	8,600	5.0%	2,942	25	10	9	2
1871	172,750	9,000	5.2%	2,737	34	11	34	—
1872	178,276	10,000	5.6%	2,388	11	3	11	—
1873	188,323	12,000	6.4%	2,863	9	1	9	—
1874	200,770	14,500	7.0%	3,231	8	1	6	2
1875	230,132	19,000	8.2%	3,921	21	1	11	1
1876	272,345	30,000	11.0%	3,376	4	4	4	—
1877	300,000	30,000	10.0%	3,012	8	0	1	5
1878	300,000	30,000	10.0%	3,007	9	6	6	2
1879	300,000	30,000	10.0%	3,174	18	1	8	10
1880	305,000	22,000	7.2%	2,955	21	3	10	11
1881	234,520	22,000	9.4%	3,204	27	3	10	12
1882	234,520	22,000	9.4%	3,151	17	2	6	8
1883	250,000	22,000	8.8%	3,002	12	1	1	7
1884	270,000	22,000	8.1%	3,288	20	2	5	13
1885	270,000	22,000	8.1%	3,191	29	4	7	22
1886	280,000	22,000	7.9%	3,140	39	6	3	36
1887	300,000	22,000	7.3%	3,128	31	4	8	23
1888	330,000	30,000	9.0%	2,914	20	4	8	12
1889	330,000	30,000	9.0%	3,022	*28	5	10	20
1890	300,000	30,000	10.0%	3,466	*34	6	1	41
1891	330,000	18,000	5.5%	3,468	*19	6	0	30
1892	330,000	18,000	5.5%	4,393	unavailable		2	62
1893	330,000	18,000	5.5%	3,614	—	7	0	36
1894	330,000	18,000	5.5%	3,782	—	4	1	39
1895	330,000	18,000	5.5%	2,680	—	6	0	14
1896	360,000	18,000	5.0%	3,422	—	5	7	32
1897	360,000	18,000	5.0%	3,583	—	10	15	28

<sup>1</sup> *Municipal Reports*, 1898, p. 200.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> *Municipal Reports*, 1899, p. 626. Statistics on admissions exclude birth figures.

<sup>4</sup> Compiled from annual *Municipal Reports*, listings of admissions to City & County Hospital. The listings include a breakdown by race: "white," "yellow," and "other."

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

\*NOTE: Discrepancy between "yellow patients" admitted and total based on nativity. No explanation given in *Municipal Reports*.

mission to the city and county facility. Fearing an influx of Chinese patients with chronic diseases, the board passed a resolution that all Chinese patients who thereafter requested care were to be assigned to a separate building on the Twenty-Sixth Street hospital lot.<sup>63</sup> Apparently, this policy remained in effect throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century. A document dated 1899 noted that

the City and County Hospital only opens its doors to a limited number of [Chinese] patients. The remainder of the patients are taken to the small, dismal Charnel-house established by the Chinese Companies, and known as the "Hall of Great Peace," or else to the Leper Asylum or Pest-House.<sup>64</sup>

Although the ban on Chinese patients at both the City and County Hospital and the Almshouse was common knowledge, city officials continued to claim that San Francisco opened its municipal facilities to the sick and poor of any nationality.<sup>65</sup>

Because of the difficulties inherent in obtaining care at municipal expense, the Chinese community sought

from an early date to fund a well-equipped hospital within the Chinatown area. Dr. Stout, in his congressional testimony in 1877, mentioned that the Chinese desired very much to establish a general hospital and a smallpox hospital, similar to those built by the French and German communities. Reportedly, the Chinese were willing "to pay liberally and freely" to establish a hospital, with patient care to be provided by both white and Chinese physicians.<sup>66</sup> (In order to secure approval from the Board of Supervisors for the erection of such a hospital, the Chinese community recognized that their physicians would have to work in conjunction with state-licensed Caucasian physicians.)

Nothing more is heard of any hospital plans until the early 1890's when land was purchased in the southern outskirts of San Francisco in the name of the Chinese consul general of San Francisco. Plans were drawn up for a hospital, and funds were collected both locally and from foreign sources. When construction of the hospital was about to begin, "city authorities forbade further





*Opening its doors in 1900, the privately funded Tung Wah Dispensary on Sacramento Street offered both Western and Chinese treatments to patients denied care at city and county medical facilities.*

proceedings on the ground that the promoters only intended to use objectionable Chinese systems of medical treatment.”<sup>67</sup> It can be surmised that the real objections were to the proposed location of the hospital outside the perimeter of Chinatown.

In 1899, the community planned to rent a house in a “suitable locality” to be fitted up as a hospital and dispensary where only practitioners with American or European diplomas were to be allowed to visit the patients. The dispensary was to give free advice and medicine to indigent clinic patients; the hospital was to consist of twenty-five beds for use by both clinic and paying patients. The Chinese Hospital (Yan-Chai-i-yün) was incorporated under California law in March, 1899. At that time, twenty-one persons (including twelve Caucasians) pledged to become members of the hospital by payment of an annual subscription of \$5. Except for the Chinese consul general, the officers of the hospital’s first governing board were to be prominent members of the white community.<sup>68</sup> This project, too, must have been shelved because no further trace of this hospital can be found.

Shortly thereafter bubonic plague was discovered in

Chinatown; public officials suddenly were faced with the fact that no health facilities existed in Chinatown for the care of plague victims. As early as May, 1900, the surgeon general of the Marine Hospital Service, Dr. Walter Wyman, suggested that one of the more “substantial” buildings in the area should be converted into a pest hospital.<sup>69</sup> The War Department, on the other hand, preferred to see the Chinese quarantined on Angel Island. Neither plan went into effect, and in April, 1901, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors appropriated funds for the erection of a hospital in Chinatown. The city auditor immediately declared that the appropriation was illegal, and accordingly, the hospital was never constructed.<sup>70</sup>

About the time that plague was discovered in Chinatown, the Chinese Six Companies realized that it was imperative for the Chinese community to organize its own health care system. The result was the Tung Wah Dispensary which opened in 1900 at 828 Sacramento Street. The dispensary, which employed both Western-trained physicians and Chinese herbalists, was funded entirely by the Chinese Six Companies, and this dispensary was to be the forerunner of the present-day

Chinese Hospital which opened its doors in April, 1925.<sup>71</sup>

In 1900, in addition to financing the dispensary, the Chinese Six Companies instituted legal action to prevent local, state, and national officials from enforcing discriminatory measures aimed at the Chinese. In court, their attorneys won the right for non-licensed Chinese physicians to attend autopsies conducted under the jurisdiction of the San Francisco Board of Health. Similarly, their lawyers forced the courts to end the quarantine of Chinatown as ordered by the Board of Health. In May, 1900, when the U.S. Marine Hospital Service imposed a ban on interstate travel by Asiatics, the secretary of the Chinese Six Companies obtained a restraining order from the U.S. circuit court, arguing that such a ban was unfair class legislation.<sup>72</sup>

Public health officials were infuriated by the legal tactics of the Chinese Six Companies. Dr. J. J. Kinyoun, federal quarantine officer for San Francisco, expressed his indignation in the following statement:

The various injunctions which have been entertained by both state and federal courts . . . have all conspired to convince the Chinese Six Companies that they in nowise consider the Chinamen amenable to observe or comply with the health laws of the city, state, or United States. The attitude assumed by this powerful corporation forms a good excuse for the individual Chinaman to follow suit and set at naught and defiance any or all rules and regulations which are considered necessary for the sanitary protection of the citizens of this state and country.<sup>73</sup>

Although the Chinese were extremely hostile to the official anti-plague measures, this lack of cooperation stemmed in part from their unfamiliarity with public health procedures. When quarantine of Chinatown was first instituted, the Chinese attempted to prevent door-to-door inspection by locking up their homes and shops.<sup>74</sup> When health officials attempted to vaccinate the Chinese with Haffkine prophylactic serum, riots broke out in Chinatown.<sup>75</sup> Finally, when health officials came into the area to search for victims of the plague, the sick

were reportedly hidden in the cellars and "subterranean passages" of Chinatown.<sup>76</sup> Health officials despaired, neither understanding nor sympathizing with the motives of the Chinese. In the words of J. J. Kinyoun: "We never can expect to accomplish in our dealings with this race what we intend to do."<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, in 1905 after the first episode of the plague had ended, public health officials retreated from Chinatown, unofficially delegating the Chinese Six Companies with the responsibility of caring for the health needs of the Chinese community.

In the years to come, the overcrowded living conditions in Chinatown were to result in a high incidence of tuberculosis. For instance, the average yearly death rate from tuberculosis for the years 1912-1914 was 622 deaths per 100,000 as compared to a citywide average of 174.<sup>78</sup> In 1929, after the introduction of tuberculin testing of cattle and pasteurization of milk, the Chinese mortality rate was 276 deaths per 100,000 as compared to a citywide average of 83.<sup>79</sup> Yet, until 1933 no public health facilities existed within Chinatown for the diagnosis or treatment of tuberculosis. One 1915 health report noted the absence of clinics in the Chinatown area and stated as follows: "The Six Companies is probably in a better position than any other group to cooperate with the Board of Health in instituting curative and preventative measures among their own people."<sup>80</sup> In other words, the city had adopted a "hands off" policy with regards to health care among the Chinese. Not until March 1933, when the Chinese Health Center was established in the nurses' room at the Commodore Stockton School, would the city attempt to cope even half-heartedly with the tuberculosis problem in Chinatown.<sup>81</sup>

Today, the outright discrimination against the Chinese has ceased. Nevertheless, a continuing phenomenon is the reluctance of many Chinese—particularly among the aged or non-English speaking immigrant groups—to seek health services outside of the Chinatown area. Thus, while members of the Chinese community rou-



tinely seek medical care in hospitals, offices, and clinics throughout San Francisco, Chinatown itself continues to present a unique situation for the organization of health services. In one sense, the Chinese ceased being medical scapegoats by 1905; after that date, advances in medical science made obsolete the nineteenth-century policy of condemning the Chinese as "carriers of alien disease." However, the failure of the City and County of San Francisco to provide health services within Chinatown was to have a more enduring effect. As late as 1967, the only outpatient facility furnishing acute medical services to the Chinese indigent in Health District IV (Chinatown-North Beach) was the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Clinic, located in North Beach and funded in part by the United Crusade and by the San Francisco Department of Public Health.<sup>82</sup> The city facility—the Northeast Health Center—was housed during this period in the basement of the Ping Yuen Housing complex; a tuberculosis clinic, a well-baby clinic, dental services, an immunization center, and a public health nursing service were all provided in 1200 square feet of converted laundry space.<sup>83</sup> In other words, a paucity of medical services existed in Chinatown as late as the 1960's; not until the 1970's was the situation finally remedied.

The illustration from the San Francisco Call, September 5, 1896, on page 77 is courtesy Dr. Albert Shumate, San Francisco. The May 26, 1882, Wasp cartoon on page 71 and the photograph on page 81 are from the Title Insurance and Trust Collection, CHS Library. The photograph on page 74 is courtesy The Bancroft Library; the photograph on page 84, courtesy Chinese Hospital, San Francisco. Other illustrations are from Frank M. Todd and the Citizens' Health Committee, *Eradicating the Plague in San Francisco* (San Francisco, 1909).

## Notes

- In the 1880's, bacteriologists began to isolate the micro-organisms responsible for some of the most feared diseases known to man. Important dates of discovery include: typhoid fever, 1880; tuberculosis, 1882; cholera, 1883; diphtheria, 1883; tetanus, 1884; and bubonic plague, 1894.
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- "Mongolian Leprosy," *Municipal Reports*, 1885, p. 247.
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- Chinatown Declared A Nuisance*, 12.
- "Mongolian Leprosy," 234-235.
- H. S. Orme, M.D., "Leprosy, Its Extent and Control, Origin, and Geographical Distribution," *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of California*, XX (1890): 170.
- "Mongolian Leprosy," 235.
- Stout, "Impurity of Race, as a Cause of Decay," 71.

29. *Report of the Quarantine Officer of the Port of San Francisco* (San Francisco: James H. Barry, 1897), p. 15.
30. San Francisco, *General Orders of the Board of Supervisors Providing Regulations for the Government of the City and County of San Francisco*, 1898, p. 478. Hereafter cited as *San Francisco Ordinances*.
31. *Ibid.*, 478-479.
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34. David Powell, "The Bubonic Plague at the Close of the Nineteenth Century," *Transactions of the Medical Society of the State of California*, XXXI (1901): 42.
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36. Vernon B. Link, *A History of Plague in the United States of America*, Public Health Monograph No. 26, Publication No. 392 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1955), pp. 3-4.
37. Harris, *California's Medical Story*, 274.
38. Remarks of J. J. Kinyoun, M.D., quoted in W. H. Kellogg, M.D., "The Pathology and Bacteriology of Bubonic Plague," *Transactions of the Medical Society of California*, XXXI (1901): 79.
39. Harris, *California's Medical Story*, 275.
40. *U.S. Statutes at Large*, XXVI (1889-1891), ch. 51, pp. 31-32.
41. *Public Health Reports*, XV (May 25, 1900): 1261.
42. *Ibid.*, May 20, 1900, p. 1259.
43. *Ibid.*, May 29, 1900, pp. 1338-1339.
44. *Ibid.*, June 4, 1900, p. 1409.
45. Link, *A History of Plague*, 5-6. See also Harris, *California's Medical Story*, 275-276.
46. Frank Morton Todd, *Eradicating Plague from San Francisco: Report of Citizens' Health Committee and an Account of Its Work* (San Francisco: Murdock & Co., 1909), p. 30.
47. Link, *A History of Plague*, 9.
48. *California State Journal of Medicine*, I (June, 1903): 192.
49. Link, *A History of Plague*, 10.
50. *Ibid.*, 10-11. See also Todd, *Eradicating Plague*, 30.
51. Todd, *Eradicating Plague*, 30.
52. Link, *A History of Plague*, 13.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 20. See also Todd, *Eradicating Plague*, 54.
54. Todd, *Eradicating Plague*, 19-22. See also Link, *A History of Plague*, 11.
55. U.S. Congress, Senate, *Report of the Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 44 Cong., 2 Sess., 1877, p. 646.
56. "Mongolian Leprosy," 236.
57. Examination of the testimony of Arthur B. Stout, M.D., before Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration, *Report of the Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration*, 1885, p. 311.
58. *Municipal Reports*, 1877, p. 398.
59. *Transactions*, 1901, p. 386. See also "Medical School: Directory of Graduates, 1864-1921," *University of California Bulletin*, third series, 15:3.
60. *Royal Commission*, 1885, p. 224.
61. Chinn, *A History of the Chinese in California*, 78.
62. *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 20, 1881.
63. *Ibid.*
64. *The Chinese Hospital of San Francisco* (Oakland: Carruth & Carruth, 1899), p. 2.
65. "Mongolian Leprosy," 236.
66. *Report of Joint Special Committee to Investigate Chinese Immigration*, 1877, p. 647.
67. *Chinese Hospital of San Francisco*, 1899, p. 2.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
69. *Public Health Reports*, XV (May 15, 1900): 1255.
70. Link, *A History of Plague*, 4.
71. T. J. Gintjee and Howard Johnson, M.D., "San Francisco's First Chinese Hospital," *Modern Hospital*, XXV (Oct., 1925), p. 283. See also Chinese Hospital, 40th Anniversary: *Chinese Hospital* (Hong Kong: Wing On Shing, [1964]), p. 1.
72. Link, *A History of Plague*, 4-5.
73. Kinyoun, quoted in Kellogg, *Transactions*, 1901, p. 85.
74. Link, *A History of Plague*, 4.
75. Society Proceedings of the California Academy of Medicine, *Occidental Medical Times*, XIV (July, 1900): 226.
76. "Plague on the Pacific Coast," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, XLIX (Dec. 14, 1907): 2000. See also Arnold Genthe and Will Irwin, *Old Chinatown* (New York: Mitchell Kennerly, 1913), p. 154.
77. Kinyoun, quoted in Kellogg, *Transactions*, 1901, p. 89.
78. San Francisco Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, *A Report of the Tuberculosis Situation in San Francisco Submitted to the Department of Public Health of the City and County of San Francisco* (San Francisco: San Francisco Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis, 1915), p. 20.
79. J. C. Geiger, M.D., Emmet E. Sappington, M.D., Roslyn C. Miller, and Hilda F. Welke, *The Health of the Chinese in An American City: San Francisco* (San Francisco: San Francisco Department of Public Health, 1939), p. 24.
80. *A Report of the Tuberculosis Situation in San Francisco*, 1915, p. 20.
81. J. C. Geiger, M.D., Roslyn C. Miller, Hilda F. Welke, and Eunice Gibson, *The Health of the Chinese in An American City: San Francisco* (San Francisco Department of Public Health, 1945), p. 5.
82. San Francisco Chinese Community Citizens' Survey and Fact-Finding Committee, *Abridged Report, August 15, 1969* (San Francisco, 1969), p. 96.
83. *Ibid.*, 99.



# Chinese Immigrants and the Angel Island Immigration Station

## *Island*

Native American Miwoks living in what is now Marin County probably had their own designation for the largest island in San Francisco Bay, but when the Spanish ship *San Carlos* dropped anchor nearby in August, 1769, commanding officer Juan Manuel de Ayala named it *Isla de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles*. Anglicized to "Angel Island" after California fell under American rule in 1846, it was known simply as "Island" to an entire generation of Chinese who immigrated to California in the first half of the twentieth century. For them this scenic spot with the cherubic name held no romantic memories, for between 1910 and 1940 it was the location of the Angel Island Immigration Station. As a major facility of the bureaucratic apparatus established to administer the Chinese exclusion laws, the complex temporarily housed tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants who were interrogated and then processed or rejected for entry into the United States.<sup>1</sup>

In the year 1882, a key date in American immigration history, the first Chinese exclusion law was passed following years of domestic anti-Chinese agitation. Marking a basic change in U.S. immigration policy, the law declared immigration to be no longer free and unrestricted, and the Chinese were given the dubious honor of being the first racial group whose entry to the country was thus limited.<sup>2</sup>

Initially the 1882 law barred only the entry of Chinese laborers for ten years and left open the question of admission of other classes of Chinese. By 1888, however, the pressure of anti-Chinese groups had shaped its interpretation so as to deny admission to all Chinese except those classes specifically exempted by treaty: officials, merchants, teachers, students, and travelers for curiosity or pleasure. The exclusion act was revised

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# of Immortals

several more times, closing loopholes and becoming stricter in its provisions, and by the turn of the century, the restriction process was consciously and actively moving toward total exclusion.<sup>3</sup>

During these years, events across the Pacific did not bode well for the Chinese people either. China's traditional society was falling apart under the pressures generated by intruding Western nations, and life was increasingly difficult. Many Chinese, especially in southeast China, were virtually forced to seek better conditions abroad. Thus, despite the known unfriendly environment for the Chinese in the United States, they were willing to risk rejection under the exclusion laws in order to enter this country and improve their economic lot. Some traveled to Canada or Mexico, where they were smuggled across the borders into the United States. Others sought admission at one of the American ports of entry, the largest proportion debarking at San Francisco. Many held credentials of questionable validity.<sup>4</sup>

Under the United States immigration regulations, the burden of proof for entry qualification rested

upon Chinese persons claiming the right of admission to, or residence within, the United States, to establish such right affirmatively and satisfactorily . . . and in every doubtful case the benefit of the doubt shall be given . . . to the United States government.

Reflecting the anti-Chinese prejudices of the period, the belief at the Bureau of Immigration was that the Chinese were a people "deficient in a sense of the moral obligation of an oath," and inspectors held all Chinese claims for right of admission suspect until proven otherwise. Believing that Chinese immigration was bad for the country, they sought to exclude rather than to admit and hence routinely subjected new arrivals to intensive and detailed cross examinations.<sup>5</sup>

Over the years an extremely high percentage of Chinese were denied admittance to the United States. For example, during the fiscal year 1902-1903, inspectors

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*"In every doubtful case the benefit of the doubt shall be given . . . to the United States government."*

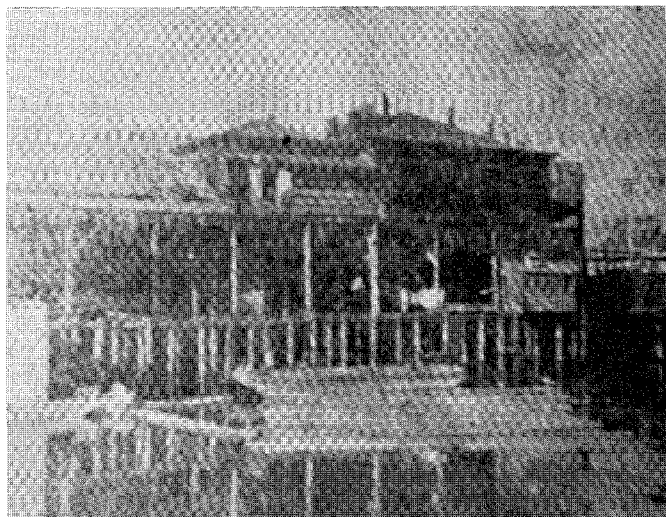
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in San Francisco landed 1628 Chinese and debarred 516, and for the fiscal years 1903 through 1905 they rejected one out of every four applicants from the exempt classes.<sup>6</sup> To the authorities these statistics served to prove the fraudulent intent of the bulk of the Chinese applying for admission.

The Chinese, however, viewed the immigration authorities' draconian administration of the exclusion laws as unfair and discriminatory, terming the statutes *keli* or "tyrannical laws." They addressed numerous complaints to the United States government and to Chinese diplomats stationed in this country, objecting to the harsh treatment of the Chinese in general and protesting in particular the suspicious and discourteous attitude evidenced toward members of the exempt classes. They charged that many questions asked by the immigration officials were unreasonable, impossible to answer correctly, and intended to entrap rather than to elucidate information. They alleged that some officials even questioned female applicants on intimate details of their marital lives and embarrassed them into silence.<sup>7</sup>

In 1905 these grievances about immigration procedures resulted in a boycott of American goods which started in Shanghai and spread to Canton and other Chinese cities and many overseas Chinese communities. Sustained several months, the boycott forced the U.S. to relax some of the more objectionable regulations. The basic negative attitude of the immigration authorities toward Chinese immigration, however, remained unchanged,<sup>8</sup> and it was against this background of struggle that the Angel Island Immigration Station was proposed and established.





*In the late nineteenth century as many as 500 Chinese were detained in a dismal two-story shed at Pacific Mail's wharf.*

throughout the late 1880's and early 1900's Chinese ship passengers arriving at San Francisco were detained in a two-story shed at the Pacific Mail Steamship Company wharf (known to the Cantonese Chinese immigrants as *muk uk* or "wooden house") until immigration inspectors could examine them and determine their admissibility. As many as 400 or 500 people were crammed into the facility, and conditions there were described in 1900 by Reverend Ira Condit, a missionary working among the Chinese in California, as follows:

Merchants, laborers, are all alike penned up, like a flock of sheep, in a wharf-shed, for many days, and often weeks, at their own expense, and are denied all communication with their own people while the investigation of their cases moves its slow length along.<sup>9</sup>

Chinese community leaders in Chinatown, alarmed at the unsafe and unsanitary condition of the structure, accordingly addressed numerous complaints to U.S. officials. Immigration Commissioner General F. P. Sargent finally inspected the facility on November 18, 1902, and was forced to declare that

[so] far as the Chinese immigrants are concerned, the facilities . . . are entirely inadequate. . . . [The] detention shed should be abolished forthwith. Chinese are human beings and are entitled to humane treatment, and this is something they do not receive under present conditions. . . .<sup>10</sup>

Sargent's report of 1903 recommended that funds be appropriated to erect an immigration station on Angel Island for accommodation of aliens, chiefly Chinese and other Asians. The forthcoming decision to move the station to Angel Island was not solely due to humanitarian concern, however, for officials also felt that the

island location would effectively prevent Chinese on the outside from communicating with the detainees and would isolate immigrants with "the communicable diseases which . . . are peculiarly prevalent among aliens from oriental countries."<sup>11</sup> The station would also be escape-proof.

The Sundry Civil Appropriation Act of March 3, 1905, included \$200,000 for erection of the station, and Walter J. Mathews was selected as architect for the facility. Work begun at the North Garrison (Winslow Cove) area of the island was interrupted by the San Francisco Earthquake in 1906, and an additional appropriation had to be requested in the same year because of the increased cost of labor and materials. Construction resumed in 1907, and the facility was completed in October of 1908. The complex included an administration building, power house, hospital, and detention building, with a wharf and dock storehouse at the beach below.<sup>12</sup>

Inquiring into the expense involved in opening the station, Assistant Secretary of Labor Wheeler reported that it was a modern and commodious plant and "delightfully located, so far as scenic, climatic and health conditions are concerned." He was of the opinion, however, that the station's remoteness from San Francisco would entail additional expense in the order of \$50,000 per annum. Wheeler also reported that there was no necessity for its immediate occupancy.<sup>13</sup>

Although leaders in San Francisco's Chinatown opposed the idea of transferring the immigration station to the middle of San Francisco Bay, they neglected to take action until the facility was almost ready to be occupied. On November 8, 1909, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce belatedly sent a letter signed by eighty prominent Chinese merchants to President William Howard Taft and the Department of Commerce and Labor protesting the move. The group maintained that the insular location and infrequency of ferry service would make it difficult for witnesses to attend immigra-

tion examinations, especially for whites who were somewhat reluctant to be witnesses in Chinese cases. The Chinese merchants also petitioned Wu Tingfang, the Chinese minister in Washington, D.C., to apply pressure through diplomatic channels.<sup>14</sup>

There is a Chinese saying, "A weak nation cannot practice effective diplomacy," and as the imperial Chinese government had been powerless to protect her subjects in America from harsh anti-Chinese exclusion laws, so the troubled government was ineffective in forestalling the move to the new facility. Hence, on November 21 the Department of Commerce and Labor rejected the Chinese community's remonstrations, pointing out that they had not raised any voice of protest when the facility was in the design stage and that it was now too late to change plans.<sup>15</sup>

The Angel Island station officially opened on January 21, 1910. The next morning at 9:00 A.M., 101 people from the S.S. *Siberia* (including 84 Chinese men, 1 Chi-

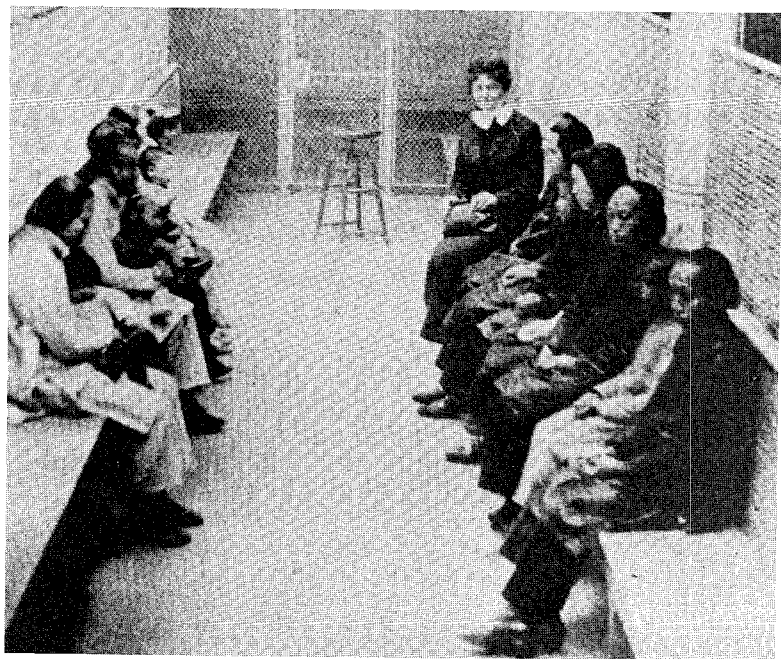
nese woman, 3 Japanese, and 4 East Indians) who had not been allowed to debark in San Francisco were removed from Pacific Mail Company's wharf and transferred to the island. The Chinese immigrants on the S.S. *China* followed, and by the end of the day, over 400 passengers, mostly Chinese, had been moved to the insular facility without incident.<sup>16</sup>

The opening of the facility moved the influential Chinatown newspaper *Chinese World* to reflect on past treatment of the community and to anticipate its future reception. On January 22, 1910, it editorialized:

Ever since the establishment of this wooden shed at the wharf, the mistreatment of us Chinese confined there was worse than for jailed prisoners. The walls were covered with poems [expressing feelings about being incarcerated]; traces of tears soaked the floor. There were even some who could not endure the cruel abuse and took their own lives. The ropes they used to hang themselves are still visible. Those seeing this cannot help but feel aggrieved and gnash their teeth in anger. Now the Chinese had been moved from this wooden shed. From now on we will be confined on a barren offshore island.

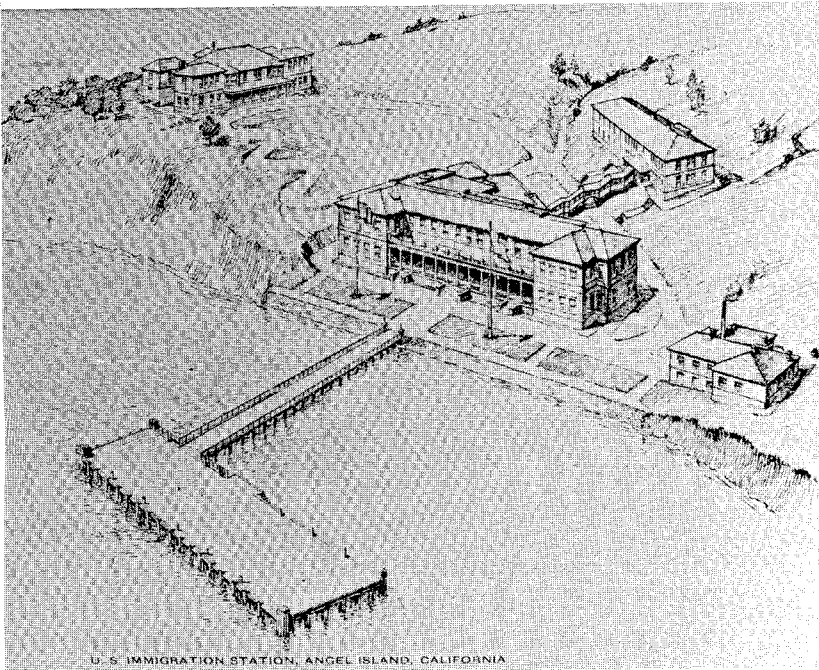
The Chinese community in San Francisco still had hopes of returning the station to the mainland, and a few weeks later the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) and the Chinese Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco respectively appointed Ng Poon Chew (Wu Panzhao) and Look Tin Eli (Lu Run-ging) to a delegation being sent to Washington, D.C., to fight the harsh and discriminatory immigration regulations. However, when the men raised the question of moving the station back to the mainland with the secretary of commerce and labor, he refused to entertain the proposal seriously and declared that access to Angel Island was easier than access to Oakland (across the Bay from San Francisco). If the Chinese didn't consider the Pacific Ocean and a month-long voyage from Hong Kong an obstacle, he concluded, why should they object to the short boat trip to Angel Island.<sup>17</sup>

The government did respond to the delegation's re-

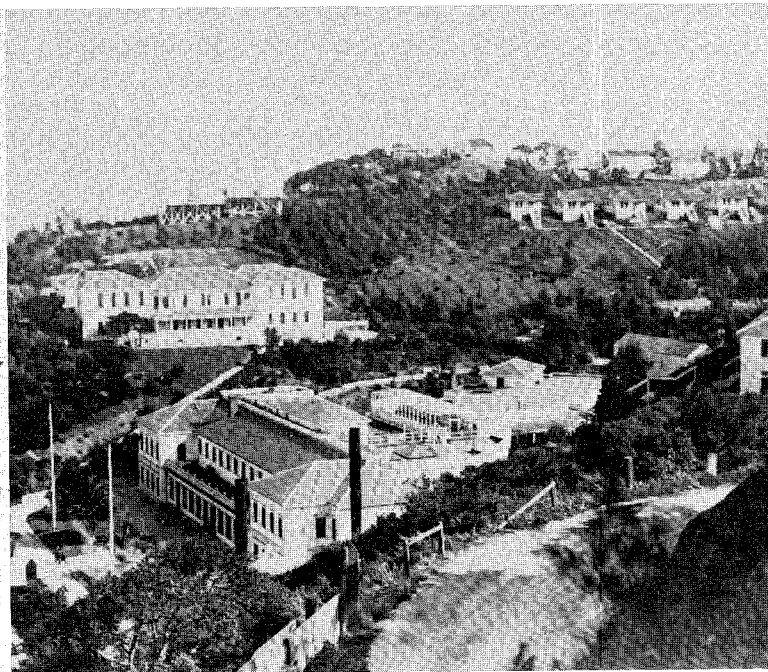


Women and men were held separately during their confinement.





U. S. IMMIGRATION STATION, ANGEL ISLAND, CALIFORNIA



quests with some small concessions. It agreed to allow principals and witnesses in outgoing cases to be examined on the mainland and to land all new exempts and return domiciled exempts whose cases seemed to hold no reason for further inquiry.<sup>18</sup> Most Chinese arrivals and their witnesses, however, still would be required to go to Angel Island. The disappointed delegation returned with meager results.

In April of that year, when Manchu Prince Zai Tao arrived at San Francisco to study military conditions in the U.S., the Chinese Consolidated Benevolent Association (CCBA) petitioned him to use his offices to help improve the treatment of the Chinese and to move the immigration station back to the mainland. In June, attorney Carroll Cook was sent by the CCBA to Washington, D.C., to discuss immigration concerns with officials, and again the status of the island station was one of the items on his agenda. There was also talk of having the transpacific Chinese passenger traffic bypass San Francisco for Seattle, as well as of renewing the 1905 anti-American boycott if the government did not accede to the Chinese requests. All these efforts to return the immigration station to the mainland failed, however, and it remained on Angel Island for the next thirty years.<sup>19</sup>

During the first decade of the facility's existence, major internal problems troubled its administration. A few months after its opening, the immigration commis-

sioner supervising the station, Hart North, was suspended from his post. One of the charges leveled against him was that he was partial to Japanese and Hindu immigration.<sup>20</sup>

In 1917 a major scandal developed when a graft ring was discovered to be stealing and manipulating Chinese records at the station in connection with illegal entries. Eighteen people were indicted (including eight from the Immigration Service), and seven were found guilty. As well, the San Francisco law firm of Stidger and Kenah, which handled numerous Chinese cases, was banned from practicing at the Bureau of Immigration.<sup>21</sup> Subsequently, no large scandals reached the station, although from time to time the occasional dismissal of interpreters and other employees indicated that petty graft was by no means completely eradicated.

It also did not take long for the government to tacitly agree with the Chinese that the insular location of the station was unsatisfactory, although they came to the conclusion for different reasons. A few months after the facility's opening, acting commissioner Luther Steward submitted reports highly critical of the many physical and sanitary drawbacks in the facility's design. As early as 1913 the visiting secretary of labor observed that Angel Island was located too far from San Francisco to be convenient as an immigration station, suggesting that Fort Mason or Alcatraz Island might be better sites. In 1920 Immigration Commissioner Edward White de-

*The proposed Angel Island facility (left) included a wharf leading to an administration building, a detention building to the rear, and a hospital to the left. Other outbuildings were added to the island complex in the 1910's and 1920's (right).*

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*"The ramshackle buildings are nothing but firetraps. . . . The sanitary arrangements are awful. If a private individual had such an establishment, he would be arrested by the local health authorities."*

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clared that the facility's structures were like tinder, and he proposed removing the station to the mainland to cut expenses. By 1922 both Assistant Secretary of Labor Edward J. Henning and Commissioner General of Immigration W. W. Husband were in agreement with this idea. The latter declared moreover that the island facilities were filthy and unfit for habitation:

The plant has practically nothing to commend it. It is made of a conglomeration of ramshackle buildings which are nothing but firetraps. They are illy arranged and inconvenient. The sanitary arrangements are awful. If a private individual had such an establishment he would be arrested by the local health authorities. The whole place is . . . not worth spending any money on.<sup>22</sup>

In subsequent years the same questions were raised time and again,<sup>23</sup> but while bureaucrats debated, tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants continued to pass through these facilities over the next two decades. It was not until 1940 that the government finally abandoned the immigration station, and the exodus was hastened by a fire which destroyed the station's administration building on August 12 of that year. On November 5, Angel Island's last group of about 200 aliens, including 125 Chinese men and 19 Chinese women, was transferred to temporary quarters at 801 Silver Avenue in San Francisco.<sup>24</sup>

This final move prompted little opposition, for although discrimination against the Chinese were still

common, the issue of Chinese immigration no longer inflamed people's passions in the same way. Exclusion laws had throttled the flow of Chinese to a small stream, and the Chinese in California had dropped from 8.7 percent of the total population in 1880 to less than 0.6 percent in 1940. Most Chinese had been relegated to occupations non-competitive with white Americans and segregated in Chinatown ghettos. Thus the Chinese were tolerated, if not accepted by many. In the intervening years, too, the focus of racist attacks had shifted to the Japanese. Moreover, by 1940 people's attentions were taken by the more immediate and pressing issue of impending world war.

After the closing of the immigration station, in an attempt to meet the political demands of the "war for democracy," Congress repealed the exclusion acts of 1943 and assigned an annual token immigration quota of 105 to the Chinese. Chinese arrivals, however, were still detained to determine the validity of their applications for admission. As for their detention quarters, after being relocated to Sharp Park in the spring of 1942, they were moved in 1944 into the Appraiser's Building at 630 Sansome Street near San Francisco's waterfront.<sup>25</sup> The practice of detaining Chinese to determine their eligibility for admission was finally discontinued in 1952 when consular officials at the port of embarkation assumed that responsibility.

For thirty years, however, it was the detainees at Angel Island Immigration Station who sampled the full flavor and effect of the exclusion laws.<sup>26</sup> When a ship arrived at San Francisco, immigration officials climbed aboard and inspected the passengers' documents. Those with satisfactory papers could go ashore, and the remainder were transferred to a small steamer and ferried to the island immigration station where they were to await hearings on their applications for entry. In prac-



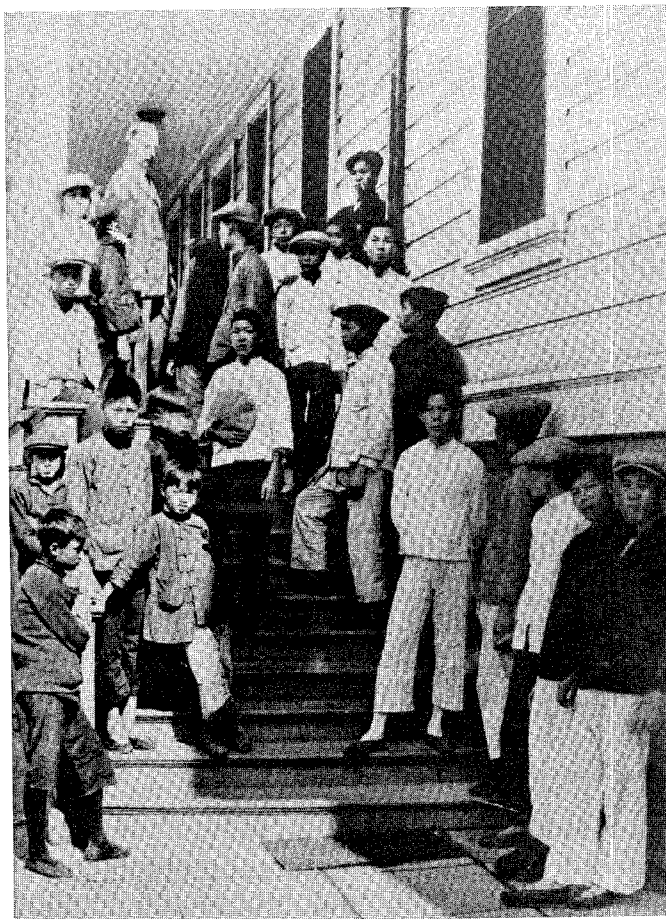
*Immigrants passed endless hours anxiously waiting for their hearings.*

tice, most of the detainees were Chinese, although sometimes a few whites and other Asians were also held. Before the 1920's the number included Japanese "picture brides."<sup>27</sup>

When the ferry docked at Angel Island whites were separated from other races, and Chinese were kept apart from Japanese and other Asians. Men and women, including husbands and wives, were separated and not allowed to see or communicate with each other again until they were admitted to the country. Minor children under age twelve or so were assigned to the care of their mothers. Most of the Chinese immigrants, however, were males in their teens or early twenties.

Soon after arrival, the would-be immigrants were taken to the hospital for medical examinations. Because of poor health conditions in rural China, some immigrants were afflicted with parasitic diseases. These cases became major points of contention, because the U.S. government classified certain of these ailments as loathsome and dangerously contagious and sought to use them as grounds for denial of admission. Arrivals with trachoma were excluded in 1903. In 1910 government officials added to the list uncinariasis or hookworm and filariasis and in 1917 clonorchiasis or liver fluke. Because these regulations affected primarily the Chinese, they seemed to many to be more artificial barriers erected to block their entry. Considerable protests by Chinatown leaders eventually resulted in some cases being allowed to stay for medical treatment.<sup>28</sup>

Chinese who passed the medical hurdle were returned to their dormitories to await hearings on their applications. Men and women lived in separate communal rooms provided with rows of single bunks arranged in two or three tiers. Furnishings were spartan in nature, and privacy was minimal. Men were kept on the second floor of the detention barracks, which was surrounded by a fence to prevent escapes. Women, originally to be detained in the same building, were moved to the second story of the administration building in the 1920's.<sup>29</sup>



At any one time about 200 to 300 males and 30 to 50 females were detained at Angel Island. Most were new arrivals, but some were returning residents whose documents were considered questionable. Also habiting the island were earlier arrivals whose applications had been denied and who were waiting either decisions on their appeal or orders for their departure. Mixed among the detainees were Chinese who had been arrested and sentenced to be deported,<sup>30</sup> as well as transients en route between China and countries neighboring the U.S., especially Mexico and Cuba.<sup>31</sup>

Guards sat outside the dormitories' locked doors, and the Chinese were usually left alone. One Chinese matron, Ah Tai, was available at the women's dormitory to answer to their needs.<sup>32</sup> To forestall the passing of coaching information prior to the detainees' oral examination, no inmate could receive visitors from the outside before his case had been judged. Authorities routinely opened and scrutinized letters and gift packages to and from detainees, inspecting them for possible coaching messages.

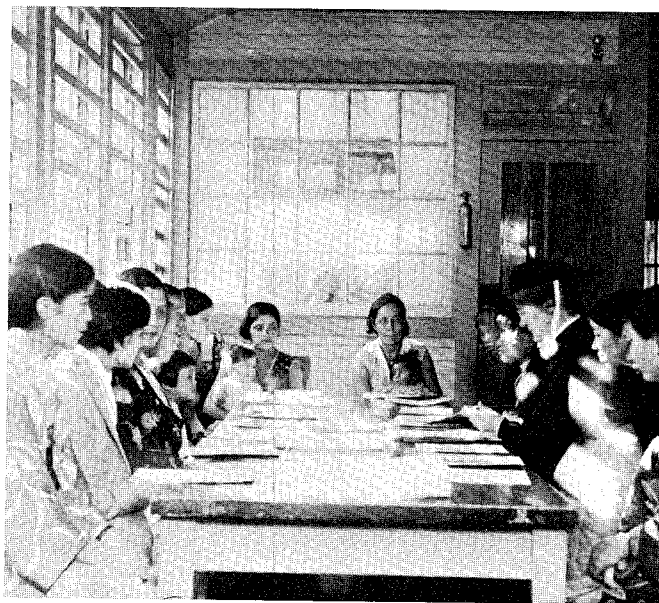
Sanitary conditions in the dormitories were barely adequate for the thrown-together transient population of strangers from all walks of life. Moreover, janitorial services were limited. Ten months after the station's opening, the acting commissioner was already criticizing the filthy conditions of the facilities. Fourteen years later, circumstances had not improved, for in 1924 the Chinese Benevolent Association bitterly complained to President Calvin Coolidge and Secretary of Labor J. J. Davis about the unhealthy conditions on the island which had allegedly caused several detainees to sicken and die. As late as 1932, the Angel Island Liberty Association, a detainees' organization (see below), was forced to negotiate with the authorities to provide soap and toilet tissue for the detainees.<sup>33</sup>

Deprived of organized activities within the dormitories,<sup>34</sup> many immigrants lolled about or laid on their bunks, most of the time worrying about their future. Some passed the time gambling, but stakes were usually small because the inmates had little pocket money. The literate read Chinese newspapers sent from San Francisco and their own books or those left behind by others. By the late 1920's or early 1930's a phonograph and Chinese opera records were also available for the detainees' amusement. Women sometimes sewed or knitted.

Separate small, fenced, outdoor recreation yards were provided for the men and women so they could breathe fresh air and enjoy sunshine. Once a week they were escorted to the storehouse at the dock where they could select needed items from their baggage. In addition, women and children were sometimes allowed to walk on the grounds in a supervised group, a privilege which was denied to the men.

Somewhat infrequently the detainees received visits from various clergymen of Chinatown's Protestant missions, but, understandably, few were converted to Christianity. During the early 1920's the Chinese YMCA also made regular trips to the island to show movies

*When permitted to visit the station, Miss Maurer taught women detainees English.*



and teach English.<sup>35</sup> The most regular visitor, however, was Deaconess Katherine Maurer (1881-1962), appointed in 1912 by the Woman's Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church to do Chinese welfare work at the immigration station. Her work was also supported by funds and gifts from the Daughters of the American Revolution. The deaconess, who became known as the "Angel of Angel Island," helped detainees to write letters, taught English, and performed other small services, primarily for the women and children, to make detention somewhat more bearable.<sup>36</sup> Neither she nor other visitors, however, could change the basic conditions created by the discriminatory exclusion laws.

The Chinese held at Angel Island resented their long confinements, particularly because they knew that immigrants from other countries were processed and released within a short time. Their disgruntled feelings were fueled by the enforced idleness and accentuated by unsatisfactory conditions at the station. Unable to change their plight, they frequently petitioned the CCBA, the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, and the Chinese consul



general for help. The first petition charging mistreatment was sent only a few days after the station opened in 1910.<sup>37</sup>

Sometimes these letters produced serious consequences beyond the expectations of the senders. For example, in 1916 the Chinese consul general in San Francisco, Xu Shangting, responded to detainees' complaints and enlisted the help of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce to investigate conditions at Angel Island. The commissioner general of immigration became irate at the consul general for bypassing diplomatic channels and had him declared *persona non grata* in the United States. Xu was transferred to another post in Panama.<sup>38</sup>

The detainees' major complaint, especially during the early years, was the quality of their food.<sup>39</sup> The concession for providing meals was awarded to private firms based on competitive bids. In 1910, the first contractors, Fong Wing (Kuang Zhujing) and his white partner, appeared to have provided adequate services.<sup>40</sup> However, they lost the contract in 1911 to a white firm which bid 12¢ to their 14¢ per meal, and shortly afterward complaints were heard about poor food. In 1913 a protest by the Chinese consul general forced the island officials to promise changes, but evidently no effective action was undertaken: in 1916 the average cost per meal had dropped to only 8¢.<sup>41</sup>

Within the station, impatient and hot-headed young immigrants often took matters into their own hands and staged disturbances in the dining hall (located in the administration building) to protest the poor food and mistreatment. Such disorders were only rarely reported by the press, but enough of them evidently occurred to cause the immigration officials to post a sign in Chinese warning diners not to make trouble nor to spill food on the floor. In 1919, a large riot broke out, and troops had to be called in to restore order. A year later authorities in Washington, D.C. finally decided to improve the situation, and fuller menus were instituted.<sup>42</sup>

After this move, complaints about the food subsided,

although two more dining hall disturbances occurred in 1925, the one on June 30 again requiring troops with fixed bayonets to be called in from Fort MacDowell. On these two occasions, however, the food itself apparently was not the primary cause.<sup>43</sup> The frequency of these outbreaks, whatever their cause, indicates that the resentment harbored among the detainees could easily explode when sparked by a suitable issue.

In later years, the food appeared to be nutritionally adequate although hardly comparable to home-cooked meals. Many immigrants later recalled the meals at the station with distaste, but the unfriendly attitude toward Chinese at the station and anxiety about the future were probably also important factors inducing these negative reactions.

For their mutual aid and to maintain order, male detainees formed in 1922 an organization called the Zi-zhihui (Self-governing Association), whose Anglicized name, ironically, was Angel Island Liberty Association. The concept appeared to have evolved from the custom in the early years of speaking with a collective voice when asking for help or expressing grievances. Its formation was promoted by politically progressive detainees, and the women did not have a corresponding organization. Officers were usually elected from the people who had been detained the longest, particularly those whose cases were on appeal, and at times respected intellectuals were also selected.<sup>44</sup>

The scope of the association's activities during any particular period depended on the nature of the current detainee population as well as the organizing and leadership abilities of the officers. When new immigrants arrived, the association would often hold a mass meeting to enroll them as members, to explain the rules of conduct at the immigration station, and perhaps to collect

*Coaching messages such as this confiscated document outlined pertinent details about home and family upon which Chinese applicants would be cross-examined.*

some money for its treasury. With its meager funds the association bought records, books, and recreational equipment for the detainees' amusement. If talented individuals were available and willing, the association would schedule weekly skits, operas, or musical concerts for diversion in the evenings. At times classes were organized for the children,<sup>45</sup> and occasionally officers succeeded in curtailing gambling in the dormitory.

Letters to and from the detainees were often handled by the officers of the group. If immigrants had complaints or requests, the association's spokesman, who usually knew some English, negotiated with the authorities. The association's officers also acted as liaison between the government officials and the inmates.<sup>46</sup>

The association also served as a link in a communication system between the detainees and the San Francisco Chinese community. Most of these activities concerned coaching messages addressed to individual detainees,<sup>47</sup> and communications in the reverse direction were sometimes accomplished.

The communications system depended upon the cooperation of Chinese employees at the station. The largely Chinese kitchen help would visit San Francisco's Chinatown on their days off. There they picked up coaching messages at certain stores, which they smuggled into the station for small fees. Various methods were then used to deliver the messages from the kitchen to the intended recipient. Most often they were passed at meal-times to the table closest to the kitchen where the association's officers sat. A waiter, for example, would serve an added dish of food and say *ga choi* (Cantonese for "added dish") or some similar phrase. This would be a signal to look for a hidden message which another could later deliver to the addressee. The association's officers also had a mutual understanding that if a guard were to detect the presence of a message, they would prevent its confiscation so that it could not be used as material evidence to jeopardize someone's entry to the country.

年之外合例。此後光緒廿三年十月假生意。至廿四年五月回省。是月七月份  
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前日標議光緒廿三年十月假生意。共做七個月回省。世若因。我李社標議  
此語廿年十月假生意。共做一年零七個月之話。或也聽差我儀未定。  
照此法子。或可以準放也。萬和泰之生意。今走先告銀卅元。共十  
四份。李功耀着約。李才着約。李社積着約。李社安着約。李社永  
着的。朱邦着約。李公依着約。李相洪着約。李慶着約。李福先着  
約。李懷先着約。李作着約。李林着約。李保着約。司事人李功耀打  
理。張月。李財主孫寶貴。李社安立舖做學格。李崇生。孫寶貴。其如要  
李功耀立舖時。若伴立此位。我相謝李功耀。廿年之久。功耀回唐與未回  
唐。我唔知。此話先隔廿二年正月入份。就尋聲萬和利。此着份子。現任  
為九。李的着股份呂順。李錫三着股份呂所。李增着份子。里心

去月。月。分。李力。順着。則。是着。萬和利。共七份。合伙。

In 1928 one such incident made newspaper headlines. A matron escorting the Chinese women into the dining room saw a girl pick up a folded piece of paper which had been dropped by one of the men filing out of the dining room. Suspecting it to be a coaching message, she snatched the paper from the girl, but the men quickly turned, seized the matron, and destroyed the physical evidence.<sup>48</sup>

The Chinese association enjoyed the support of the detainees because it filled a need and fostered a sense of unity among the disparate individuals sharing only one common goal—entering the United States—who were thrown together thousands of miles from their native China. This explains why, despite the one-way traffic (most Chinese went through the station only once) and highly transient population in the dormitory, the association was able to maintain itself for three decades until 1952 or so when Chinese arrivals were no longer detained *en masse* for hearings.



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*Regardless of the validity of their claims for entry, Chinese arrivals expected to be interrogated intensively.*

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The immigrant's hearing on his application for admission was the main reason for his detainment at the Angel Island barracks, and sometime after he arrived, he received a summons to appear for this session. During the early years at the center this waiting period could stretch into months, which became the cause of many complaints.<sup>49</sup> By the mid-1920's, however, the delay averaged about two or three weeks. The immigrant's success in hurdling the hearing barrier determined whether the applicant would be admitted to the U.S. or face deportation back to China, and thus it was an important event which could shape the direction of one's entire life.

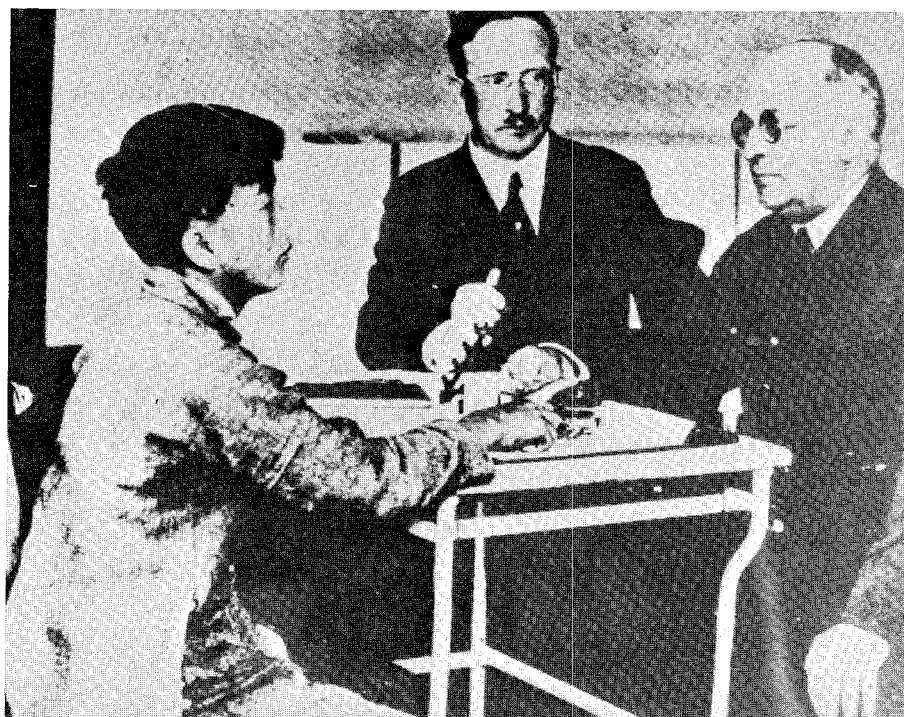
Regardless of the validity of the Chinese arrival's claim for entry, he expected to be interrogated intensively, and in anticipation, the applicant studied coaching information during the weeks and months preceding his transpacific voyage so as to commit to memory facts pertinent to his family, home life, and native village. The required information was often extremely detailed, and the coaching papers might be a booklet with several dozen pages. This was particularly true in cases where the applicant and his witnesses claimed relationships which were fictitious. Coaching papers were frequently taken aboard ship for review and thrown overboard or destroyed as the ship approached the American harbor.

During the early years, the conduct and procedure for examining applicants and witnesses produced numerous complaints of unfairness from the Chinese, but in 1919 the procedure was changed, and the new boards of special inquiry for Chinese cases put them on the

same footing as other aliens. The resulting board of special inquiry was made up of two inspectors, one of whom was the chairman who asked most of the questions, plus a stenographer. This board was not bound by technical rules of procedure or evidence as applied by courts. The purpose of the hearing was to determine if the applicant was entitled to enter the United States under the exclusion acts and general immigration laws.<sup>50</sup>

Many Chinese entered the country as members of the exempt classes, but by far the greater number applied for entry by claiming citizenship by birth or by derivation.<sup>51</sup> Because the majority of Chinese cases involved issues of relationship or American birth and because independent evidence and documents usually did not exist to corroborate or disprove the claims, the scope and method of examination for Chinese cases were different from that applied to other nationalities of immigrants. Evidence was often confined to the testimony offered by the applicant and his witnesses, and the objective of the board was to ascertain the validity of this evidence by cross-examination and comparison of testimony on every matter which might reasonably tend to show whether or not the claim was valid.<sup>52</sup> Under these guidelines the board of inquiry had great latitude in pursuing its interrogation.

Some inspectors were strict but fair; others delighted in matching wits with the interrogee; still others were thorough and meticulous. The type of question asked often depended on the case and the chairman's individual style. Over the years, one of the persistent complaints of the Chinese were questions of minute details which apparently had no relevance to the objectives of the board.<sup>53</sup> Some questions would have been difficult for anyone to answer even under normal circumstances: How many times a year were letters received from a person's father? How did a person's father send the money to travel to the U.S.? How many steps were there at the front door of a person's house? Who lived in the third house in the second row of houses in the



*Each Chinese applicant was required to prove his acceptability to immigration officials in grueling interrogation sessions.*

village? Of what material was the flooring in the bedroom of a person's house? What was the location of the kitchen rice bin?

Because Chinese immigrants usually did not understand English and the inspectors did not speak fluent Chinese, an interpreter was needed at the hearing proceedings. In order to forestall collusion between the applicant and witnesses, a different interpreter was used for each session. At the end of each session the board chairman would usually ask the interpreter to identify the dialect in which the answers were being made in order to ascertain whether the applicant and witnesses alleged to be members of the same family were speaking the same dialect.

Sometimes applicants and witnesses were recalled and reinterrogated about questionable points. A typical proceeding usually lasted two or three days. During these interrogations, memories might fail, wrong answers might be given, and unforeseen questions might be asked. Hence it was often necessary to smuggle coaching information into the detention quarters to eliminate inconsistencies in answers.

If the testimony of the applicant largely corroborated that of the witnesses, the authorities admitted him into the country. If an unfavorable decision was handed down, the applicant's family had the choice of allowing

him to be deported to China or of appealing to higher authorities in Washington, D.C. or to the courts to reverse the judgment.<sup>54</sup> As a result some immigrants languished under detention on Angel Island for as long as two years before their cases were finally decided.

Most of the debarred swallowed their disappointment and stolidly awaited their fate. Some, it was said, committed suicide, although such occurrences appeared to be rare, and little information appeared in the newspapers and public documents.<sup>55</sup> Some disappointed applicants vented their frustrations and mental anguish by writing or carving Chinese poems on the detention center's walls as they waited for the results of appeals or orders for their deportation. Today, many of the carvings which literally covered the quarters' walls are still legible under layers of paint applied in the intervening years.<sup>56</sup>

Usually undated and anonymous, most of this poetry was written before the 1930's. Practically all the poems are in the classical style made famous during China's Tang dynasty (618-907 A.D.). Recurrent through many of the works are feelings of disillusion, resentment, and bitterness about the treatment received at Angel Island.

This place is called an island of immortals  
But as a matter of fact the mountain wilderness is a prison.  
The bird plunges in even though it sees the open net.  
Because of poverty, one can do naught else.



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*"This place is called  
an island of immortals  
but . . . the mountain wilderness  
is a prison."*

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Others expressed anger:

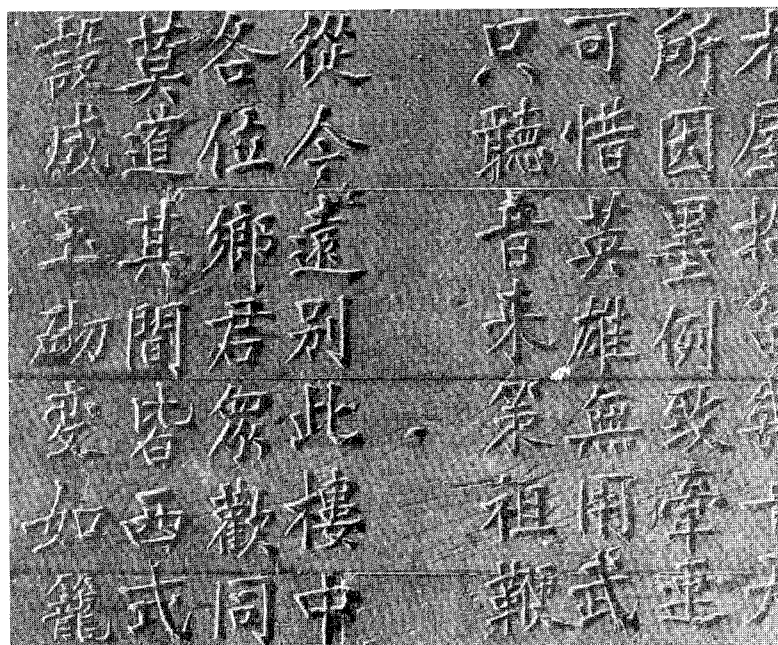
The small building with three beams is just sufficient to  
shelter the body.  
It is unbearable to tell accumulated stories on these island  
slopes.  
Wait till the day I become successful and fulfill my wish!  
I will not be sparing and will level the customs station.<sup>57</sup>

Still other poems worried about families left behind in  
China and of the uncertain future:

Why do I have to sit in jail?  
It is only because my country is weak and my family is  
poor.  
My parents wait at the door in vain for news.  
My wife and child wrap themselves in their quilt, sighing  
with loneliness.  
Even should I be allowed to enter this country,  
When can I make enough to return to China with wealth?  
Since the ancient days, most of those who leave home  
become worthless.  
Heretofore how many had ever returned from wars?

Few other documents from the Angel Island Immigration  
Station express more eloquently and intensely the  
feelings and sentiments of the Chinese immigrants of  
that era.

**A**ngel Island had been called the Ellis Island of the  
West. For thousands of immigrants from countries



rimming the Pacific Basin, it was the portal to the "land  
of opportunity." Unlike its famed sister station on the  
Atlantic coast, however, Angel Island did not extend  
welcoming hands to all who came, for it was built  
primarily to facilitate administration of the Chinese ex-  
clusion laws. To Chinese arrivals it was a half-open door  
at best, a prominent symbol of a racist immigration  
policy.

Angel Island station was established during a period of  
virulent anti-Chinese prejudices, attitudes reflected in  
the official stance of the immigration service that Chi-  
nese immigrants were undesirable. Immigration authori-  
ties attempted to carry out this policy to its fullest  
measure by draconian execution of the exclusion laws.  
Sustained resistance by the Chinese community and their  
sympathizers in the larger society, however, eventually  
resulted in many harsh regulations and practices being  
modified or rescinded, and Chinese arrivals gradually  
were treated with greater regard to due process of law.  
By the late 1930's the number of Chinese rejections for  
entry had dropped below 5 percent,<sup>58</sup> although the  
ordeal of detentions and hearings continued.

Although it is undeniable that many Chinese entered  
the U.S. with fraudulent credentials and thus technically  
violated the immigration laws, this practice was made  
necessary by unjust and discriminatory laws. It is also  
true that applicants with valid claims were denied entry  
because they could not properly convince hostile boards  
of inquiry. Their experiences on Angel Island and under

*Anonymous detainees carved poems on the detention center's walls while awaiting decisions on their cases.*

the American exclusion laws laid the groundwork for the behavior and attitudes of an entire generation of Chinese Americans. Unpleasant memories as well as shaky legal status led many Chinese to regard immigration officers as objects to avoid and fear. The insensitive attitude of the authorities toward Chinese immigrants only reinforced these sentiments. Moreover, the feeling among Chinese that they were allowed in this country only on sufferance of the dominant white majority helped to foster alienation and non-involvement in the larger society. Racism indeed had exacted a high price.

Today, immigration laws no longer blatantly discriminate against specific racial groups. But the lonely hulk of the Angel Island detention building, with its walls covered with carvings expressing the hopes and heartbreaks of nameless Chinese immigrants, stands as a stark reminder that not so very long ago the nation's immigration policy was based on the premise that some racial groups were preferred to others in the United States.<sup>59</sup>

*The photographs on pages 94 and 99 are from the National Archives; on page 95, courtesy Mrs. Everett C. Schneider; and on page 91, the CHS Library. The photograph on page 90 is reproduced from Chinese World, January 22, 1910; those on page 92, from Report of the Commissioner of Immigration for 1907 and 1912. The coaching message is from Senate, Report 776, "Chinese Exclusion," 57 Congress, 1 Session, 1904, and the poems is courtesy Mak Takahashi.*

## Notes

1. See map by A. L. Kroeber, "Native Tribes, Groups, Language, Families and Dialects of California in 1770," in R. F. Heizer and M. A. Whipple, *The California Indians, A Source Book* (Berkeley, 1971). Angel Island is part of Marin County, which was the home of the Miwoks. M. B. Hoover, H. E. and E. G. Rensch (revised by W. N. Abeloe), *Historic Spots in California*, 3rd Edition (Stanford, 1966), p. 348.  
In their writings Chinese often used the name *Tianshi Dao*, a direct translation of Angel Island. In other instances transliterations of various Cantonese dialects were used, such as *Yin-jou Ai-lan* or *Eng-ji Ai-lun*.
2. T. W. Chinn, H. M. Lai, P. P. Choy, *A History of the Chinese in California* (San Francisco, 1969), p. 26.
3. D. L. McKee: *Chinese Exclusion Versus the Open Door Policy, 1900-1906* (Detroit, 1977), p. 29. The 1882 act was amended in 1884. Two laws were passed in 1888 restricting reentry of laborers. The 1882 act was extended in 1892 and again in 1902. In 1904 exclusion of laborers was extended indefinitely. Exclusion was also extended to U.S. possessions.
4. U.S. Congress, House, Document No. 847, *Compilations from the Records of the Bureau of Immigration of Facts Concerning the Enforcement of the Chinese Exclusion Laws* (1906), pp. 13, 9.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 6.
6. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1902/1903*, p. 107; 1904/1905, p. 98.
7. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1904/1905*, p. 81; *Chinese World*, May 2, 1910. CCBA Petition to Prince Zai Tao, who was in the U.S. to study military conditions.
8. McKee, *Chinese Exclusion*, 192.
9. U.S. Congress, Senate, Report No. 776, *Chinese Exclusion*, 57 Congress, 1 Session, 1904, p. 313; Ira M. Condit, *The Chinaman as We See Him and Fifty Years of Work for Him* (New York, 1900), pp. 86-7.
10. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1909/1910*, p. 132; *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 18, 1902.
11. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1902/1903*, p. 63.
12. Section III, "Historical American Building Survey," in *Recommendations for the Historical Recreational Development of Angel Island*, prepared by Marshall McDonald and Associates for the Division of Beaches and Parks, State of California (1966); U.S. Congress, House, Report No. 4640, *Immigration Station on Angel Island, Cal.*, 59 Congress, 1 Session, 1906; *San Francisco Chronicle*, August 18, 1907.
13. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1908/1909*, p. 144.
14. File No. 52961-26B, Record Set 85, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; *Chung Sai Yat Po*, Nov. 12, 1909.
15. *Chung Sai Yat Po*, Nov. 30, 1909.
16. *Chinese World*, Jan. 22, 1910; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Jan. 23, 1910.
17. *Chinese World*, April 5, 1910. The CCBA, also known as the Chinese Six Companies, was at the time considered the spokesman for the Chinese community in America.
18. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1909/1910*, p. 133.
19. *Chinese World*, May 2, June 9, March 1, 1910.
20. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Oct. 28, 1910.
21. U.S. Congress, House, Document No. 209, *Report on House Resolution 225*.
22. Luther C. Steward, Acting Commissioner, San Francisco, to commissioner general, Dec. 19, 1910, Record Set 85, National



- Archives; *Chinese World*, Nov. 17, 1913; *San Francisco Chronicle*, Aug. 8, 1920, March 14, 1922, Nov. 1, 1922.
23. For example, see *San Francisco Chronicle*, Dec. 12, 1923; Feb. 27, 1924; Oct. 10, 1927; Nov. 23, 1934; Feb. 24, 1937; Mar. 29, 1937.
  24. *Chung Sai Yat Po*, Aug. 12, Nov. 7, 1940.
  25. Handwritten manuscript on Angel Island Immigrant Station stationery, n.d., anonymous.
  26. Information on the life of Chinese immigrants in the detention quarters was pieced together from interviews with thirty-five people who were on the island, including two interpreters, two inspectors, and a kitchen helper as well as male and female detainees whose experience spanned the entire period the immigration station was active.
  27. *Annual Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1919/1920*, p. 370. It should be noted that the station was not used solely for immigrants. It was used during World War I to intern enemy alien seamen, and until 1925, it also used to hold federal prisoners. The immigration commissioner ordered all prisoners off the island when some of them attempted to escape.
  28. *Chinese World*, December 15, 1910. The Chinese community of San Francisco sent Dr. King H. Kwan (Guan Qiangting) of China as their representative to Washington, D.C. He succeeded in convincing the Department of Commerce and Labor that filariasis was not a dangerous contagious disease and that patients should be allowed to stay in the U.S. for medical treatment. *Chinese World*, Jan. 30, 1922. The Chinese community fought the liver fluke regulation all through the 1920's. In 1927, Dr. Fred Lam (Lin Ronggui) of Honolulu, delegated by the Chinese Chambers of Commerce of Honolulu and San Francisco to go to Washington, D.C., successfully proved to public health officials that clonorchiasis or liver fluke was not contagious in the U.S., and the regulation was amended accordingly.
  29. Dorene Askin, *Historical Report, Angel Island Immigration Station* (draft), June 3, 1977, p. 5.
  30. Most of the deportees were arrested for fraudulent entry or for committing crimes. A few were deported for political reasons. Xavier Dea (Xie Cang), a radical leader of the Chinese Unemployed Council in San Francisco, was deported during the early 1930's to the USSR. *Chinese World*, May 16, 1931.
  31. H. D. Evey, *Chinese Exclusion Laws and Immigration Laws as Applied to Chinese*, Second series, Lecture No. 32, Pt. 1, Jan. 21, 1935. Some poems in the detention barracks were written by Chinese going to Mexico or Cuba.  
Chinese laborers in transit were admitted if they posted bonds. This was not required if they transferred from one vessel to another vessel in a U.S. port, and some of these evidently were detained on Angel Island. One interviewee who arrived at Angel Island from China in 1929 met his uncle who was on his way to China from Cuba. He was detained on the island awaiting the ship's arrival.  
Many deportees from neighboring countries were also detained on Angel Island while waiting for a ship to China. During the period of anti-Chinese agitation in Mexico in the early 1930's, many Chinese surrendered to U.S. authorities and were deported via San Francisco.
  32. Ah Tai was hired from Cameron House, maintained by the Chinese Presbyterian Mission in San Francisco as a home for orphaned girls and girls from broken families and in trouble, in 1910. *Chinese World*, Feb. 22, 1910.
  33. Steward to commissioner general, Dec. 19, 1910; *Chinese World*, Mar. 17, 1924, Dec. 3, 1932.
  34. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration, 1922/1923*, p. 30.
  35. For example, *Chung Sai Yat Po* reported on visits by the Chinese YMCA in the following issues: May 13, June 24, July 21, Aug. 4, Oct. 1, Oct. 15, Oct. 17, Oct. 29, 1925; Aug. 26, 1926. The visits appeared to have ceased by the 1930's.
  36. Kuan Yin, *Goddess of Mercy on Angel Island* (Cincinnati, 1939?); *Daughters of the American Revolution, Angel Island* (1929).
  37. *Chung Sai Yat Po*, Jan. 27, 1910.
  38. *Chinese World*, Feb. 17, Mar. 1, Sept. 26, 1916.
  39. The responsibility for feeding the detainees was borne by the steamship company until island officials ruled on eligibility for admission. Subsequent to that date, the cost fell on the shoulders of the applicant or his sponsor. *Chinese World*, Jan. 25, 1911.
  40. According to the *Chinese World*, Feb. 28, 1910, the menu was as follows: BREAKFAST—Tea, rice, pork with white greens, winter melon, dried lily flowers, Chinese cabbage, mustard greens, or dried bean sticks, plus one small dish. LUNCH—Congee with pork and dried shrimps, congee with beef and dried white greens, sweet congee with green beans, sweet congee with red beans, coffee and bread, or sweet tapioca soup. DINNER—Tea, rice, beef cooked with cabbage, dried bamboo shoot, potatoes, or turnips. Fresh fish or bean vermicelli with dried shrimp on Friday; plus one small dish. The small dish could be salt fish, preserved olive, fermented bean curd, sweet pickles or plum sauce.
  41. *Chinese World*, Feb. 26, 1911; May 13, 1911; Sept. 6, 1913; Mar. 1, 1916.
  42. Mary Bamford, *Angel Island, The Ellis Island of the West* (Chicago, 1917), p. 15; *Chinese World*, Jan. 15, 1919; Mar. 19, 1920. The new menu was as follows: BREAKFAST—Tea and rice with following dishes: Pork with preserved stem cabbage, greens (Mon.); pork and mustard greens soup, fermented bean curd (Tues.); pork with greens, salt fish (Wed.); pork with dried bean sticks, plum sauce (Thurs.); pork and winter melon soup, bean curd with soy sauce (Fri.); beef steamed with sweet

- pickles, greens (Sat.); bean vermicelli with pork, fermented bean paste (Sun.). LUNCH—Biscuits, bread, and tea with the following: Pork congee (Mon.); sweet tapioca soup (Tues., Thurs., Sat.); pork and fish congee (Wed.); pork congee (Fri.); pork noodles (Sun.). DINNER—Tea, rice with following: Bean vermicelli with pork, salt fish (Mon.); fish with dried lily flowers, preserved olive with potatoes, preserved olives (Wed.); beef with bean sprouts, salt fish (Thurs.); codfish with dried lily flowers, preserved olives (Fri.); pork with white beans, preserved olives (Sat.); beef with turnips or cloud fungus, beef with onions, salt fish (Sun.).
43. In March, 1925, officials decided to let new arrivals dine first because of crowded conditions. Detainees who had been on the island for a longer time took exception to this arrangement and caused a disturbance. *Chinese World*, Mar. 27, 1925. In 1925 Chinese accused a white waiter at the dining hall of being an informer. On June 30 he served the detainees stale bread, and they attacked the waiter and guard with utensils and table settings.
  44. *Chinese World*, Aug. 24, 1923. In an interview on July 16, 1977, J. P. Wong, an old Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalist Party) member, claimed that Lin Qushen, a Kuomintang member, was the founder of the Zizhihui. So far no other corroborating evidence had been found. The Kuomintang, however, during the early part of the century, was a militant group, and the idea of the Zizhihui was a concept which would fit into the Kuomintang ideology of that period.
  45. For example, in 1932 the Chinese association started a school. *Chinese World*, Jan. 9, 1932.
  46. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Nov. 6, 1940.
  47. Gilbert Woo (Hu Jingnan); "Messengers on Angel Island (Tian-shi Dao shang ti Daixinren)" *Chinese Pacific Weekly*, Nov. 28, 1974.
  48. *San Francisco Examiner*, Mar. 20, 1928.
  49. In 1913 the Chinese consul general complained of long delays in Chinese cases. *Chinese World*, Nov. 8, 1913. In 1916 a committee of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce investigating conditions on Angel Island found the same situation. *Chinese World*, Mar. 1, 1916.
  50. *U.S. Immigration Service Bulletin*, Vol. I, No. 12, Mar. 1, 1919. Edward L. Haff: *Boards of Special Inquiry*, 2nd Series, Lecture No. 24, Nov. 26, 1934.
  51. From July 1, 1920, until June 30, 1940, some 71,040 Chinese entered the U.S. as U.S. citizens, while aliens admitted during the same period numbered 66,039, with a large percentage being merchants and their families. Timothy J. Molloy, "A Century of Chinese Immigration: A Brief Review," *Immigration and Naturalization Service Monthly Review*, Dec., 1947, pp. 69-75. Most of the citizens in the earlier years were "native sons" but by the late 1920's, more and more sons and even grandsons of natives began to apply for admission. *Report of the Commissioner-General of Immigration 1927/1928*, p. 15.
  52. Haff, *Boards of Special Inquiry*.
  53. A joint investigating committee of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce and the Merchant's Exchange found it "an impossibility" for any applicant to answer the inspector's questions correctly. *Chinese Defender*, Oct. 10, 1910. Another Chamber investigating committee also concluded that inspectors asked nit-picking questions. *Chinese World*, Mar. 1, 1916. One inspector from the 1930's recalled that he used to probe for information about: the applicant himself; the applicant's family; older generations related to applicant; the applicant's village; neighbors in the applicant's village; the applicant's house in the village; the village market attended by the applicant's family; the homeward journey of the applicant's father; the applicant's trip to Hong Kong.
  54. Haff, *Boards of Special Inquiry*.
  55. One of the rare incidents noted by the press was an unsuccessful suicide attempt in 1926, when a woman jumped from the building and injured her head and left leg. *Chinese World*, May 18, 1926.  
At least two suicides, one successful and the other unsuccessful, were reported in 1948. By this time, the detention quarters was in the Appraisers' Building in San Francisco. *San Francisco Chronicle*, Sept. 24, Oct. 27, 1948.
  56. There are more than 60 poems identified so far on the walls of the detention building. In addition two collections of poems copied by detainees Smiley Jann and Tet Yee in 1931 and 1932 respectively had come forth. The Jann and Yee collections included 92 and 93 poems each. In all there are more than 130 different poems known today.
  57. The Chinese immigrants often did not distinguish between the custom and immigration stations.
  58. *Annual Reports, Secretary of Labor* for 1937, 1938, 1939, 1940 (Washington, D.C.).
  59. In 1976, the California state legislature passed a bill allocating \$250,000 for the preservation and historical interpretation of the immigration detention building on Angel Island.



## Book Reviews

### *Rim-Rock and Sage:*

#### *The Collected Poems of Maynard Dixon.*

By Maynard Dixon. Introduction by Kevin Starr. (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1977. xxxiii, 125 pp. Illustrations. \$29.95.)

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*Reviewed by Richard Dillon, head of the California State Library's Sutro Branch in San Francisco and author of the new biography of Commodore Perry, We Have Met the Enemy.*

Kevin Starr's penetrating essay in the Winter, 1977/78, *Quarterly* of the California Historical Society, which was excellent, aside from its tongue-twisting, alliterative (and terrible) title, "Painterly Poet, Poetic Painter," was an expansion or, at least, an adaptation of his Introduction to *Rim-Rock and Sage*. Although some hard-headed critics will say that Starr has let his enthusiasm gallop away with him, the essay (in either form) could very easily stand alone as a small book—say, a Capra Press chapbook.

Design and execution of this limited edition, only 1300 copies, is by that viking of 'Frisco printers, Andrew Hoyem, heir-apparent to the grand Grabhorn Press tradition.

The text is enhanced by a fine frontispiece photo of the artist by his second wife, Dorothea Lange, much better-known as a photographer for her Dust Bowl social documentation than for portraiture. Eight drawings by Dixon, fittingly printed in a kind of desert terra cotta color, are scattered through the text. Six of them are on classic Southwest themes—landscapes or Indians—which might be clichés in lesser hands than Dixon's. Two are experimental, perhaps surrealist. They involve twisting human figures and remind this viewer, absurdly or not, of the possible influence of Art Deco on Dixon. After all, he was very much affected by architecture, Cubism, and even impressionism.

In any case, the proportions are reversed in the poetry. Few poems deal with Dixon's warm Southwest landscapes. Many are autobiographical, personal; some are intensely emotional, sensual.

As Starr points out, Dixon's poetry illuminates a hidden facet of his character, almost the opposite of his public viewpoint, which was largely optimistic even when he was depicting dour, mysterious Indians, or even the Depression strife of his own social documentation of the 1930's. It is obvious that the poems were as much autotherapy as creativity, *per se*. That they supplied him with a means of releasing

the terrific pressures and tensions which teetered in a fragile balance with the lightness of his soul. These private poems (few were ever published before) express the anguish and depression of a man who was easily hurt, but hated to show it.

All 164 of Dixon's known poems are here, good and bad. We would not dare run every sketch which he tossed into a wastebasket, but the editor is probably wise in using all of his verse, for it is so limited and secret, or at least unknown. Starr sees Dixon as a poet as well as a painter. True, he had a virile, Whitmanesque style, which is refreshing when compared with the bland poesy of the late teens and 1920's in the West. But his poetry never reaches the creative level of his best pictorial art, perhaps because it was a conscious release, a device. Perhaps it can be equated with his murals, his newspaper and magazine illustrations, even his field sketches. But never with the best of his easel paintings, like *Witch of Sityatki* or *Earth Knower*.

Some of his poetry is flat, mundane. Some is merely a way of recording an incident, a kind of lyrical journal-entry. A little is querulous bitching over how rough life can be. There is a lot on *amours*, both fulfilled or unrequited. Most of his poems, however, are interesting and instructive.

With Starr, we now can see why Dixon was such a poetic painter, so emotionally powerful and insightful with his brush strokes. And we are reminded that even bohemian painters live lives of quiet desperation. Without this outlet for letting off steam, Dixon might never have persevered with his real art, painting, and we would not have his interpretations of Navajo horsemen, mesas, buttes, cumulus clouds, and crumpled arroyo shadows.

Now, if someone (Starr?) would only unearth and edit his prose, published and unpublished, to provide us with a picture of the artist in even sharper definition!

The book is a *must* for anyone seriously interested in Dixon, the Southwest, or in the mystery of art and creativity.

### *Blacks in Gold Rush California.*

By Rudolph M. Lapp. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977. xiv, 321 pp. Illustrations. \$15.00.)

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*Reviewed by Charles Wollenberg, Reviews Editor, California History.*

Although blacks comprised only one or two percent of California's population during the 1850's, their presence was of

more significance than the numbers would indicate. The nation was moving inexorably toward civil war during the Gold Rush decade, and the future of slavery as well as the political status of blacks were major issues of the day. The presence of even a small number of blacks forced Californians to confront these issues, often with contradictory results. While California was a "free," non-slave state which remained loyal to the union, it also denied blacks (as well as Asians and Indians) most basic civil and political rights. Nowhere else did blacks have a greater chance to gain economic prosperity, but like other western states, California imposed a massive structure of legalized discrimination on its non-white residents.

Rudolph Lapp has been studying the black experience in Gold Rush California for nearly twenty years. In the 1960's he published a series of excellent articles on the subject, and it is fitting that now he has synthesized his findings in a book-length study. His work is a solid piece of narrative history. The coverage is sometimes episodic, due to a lack of sources, but the episodes are well-chosen to give insight into the human dilemmas caused by Gold Rush race relations.

Two clear themes emerge from Lapp's factual story. First, California's black population was active and adamant in its attempt to gain equal treatment under the law. Conferences, petitions, legal actions, and direct protests were used to fight discrimination and advocate equality. Second, white allies were often crucial in achieving what victories were won against the prevailing racism.

For Lapp, the climax of the story is the 1858 migration of a significant portion of the state's black population to British Columbia in hopes of finding greater freedom and opportunity. However, I would argue that a more fitting climax was the rapid disappearance of most discriminatory legislation applying to blacks after the Civil War. Lapp mentions this substantial victory over *de jure* racism, but he does not analyze it fully because of his focus on the Gold Rush decade of the 1850's. In fact, many of the political and social struggles of the 1850's culminated in the period following the Civil War, and the book would have been improved if Lapp had extended his detailed coverage through the mid-1870's.

Nevertheless, *Blacks in Gold Rush California* is a significant contribution to the understanding of California social history. It documents the brave efforts of Gold Rush blacks to gain civil respect and dignity and thus illuminates a quest for social justice that is an important part of this state's heritage.

### *Conquer and Colonize: Stevenson's Regiment and California.*

By Donald C. Biggs. (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1977. 263 pp. Illustrations. \$12.95.)

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*Reviewed by James J. Rawls, Department of History, Diablo Valley College, Pleasant Hill.*

Shortly after Congress declared that a state of war existed between the United States and Mexico, President Polk authorized formation of a regiment of volunteers for special duty in California. Jonathan D. Stevenson, a Democrat and former member of the New York legislature, was selected as leader of the regiment and instructed to recruit only persons of "good habits" and "various pursuits" who would be likely to remain on the Pacific coast at the end of the war. The object of the regiment quite clearly was colonization; its creation reveals that at the outset of the Mexican War the Polk administration was determined on the permanent conquest of California.

Donald Biggs has written a thorough history of this unique regiment of American volunteers. Using original muster rolls and other primary sources, he has reconstructed the occupational and social structure of the regiment. As might be expected, the unit consisted primarily of young white males from several urban centers in New York. Included in its ranks were tinsmiths, printers, butchers, bakers, lawyers, tailors, merchants, and even an umbrella maker and perfumer. The motives of the volunteers, Biggs concludes, were a mixture of patriotism and self-interest. Some saw in their actions a working out of Divine Providence and Manifest Destiny, while others were intent on new opportunities to practice their trades.

The regiment, which eventually numbered over 800 men, arrived in California in March, 1847, and was deployed as an army of occupation. Biggs argues that historians have ignored the military aspect of the regiment's activities. He points out that two companies of the regiment saw "considerable action" in Baja California, that members of the regiment pursued horse-stealing Indians, and that as a whole the unit "presented a visible remainder to the Californians that the territory was occupied." The fact remains, however, that Stevenson's regiment arrived in Alta California nearly two months *after* the Capitulation at Cahuenga. Although their presence may have deterred further resistance, there





were no armed clashes between Stevenson's men and the Californians. On the contrary, as Biggs concedes, the volunteers were feted with "parties, balls, and fandangos almost every evening" while garrisoned at Los Angeles.

Biggs also argues that historians have underestimated the positive contributions of the regiment to California history. While avoiding the adulatory stance of Francis D. Clark, self-appointed regimental historian who published a history in 1882, Biggs makes a strong case in defense of the volunteers. Out of their ranks came businessmen, attorneys, journalists, and public officials who were prominent in California affairs for decades. The San Francisco Legislative Assembly was "almost exclusively an operation of former New York Volunteers," and seven of the forty-eight delegates at the 1849 constitutional convention were former volunteers.

The tarnished reputation of the regiment comes largely from its members' association with a band of San Francisco ruffians known as the Hounds. Biggs minimizes the importance of this association and reminds us that the group organized to suppress the Hounds also included former volunteers. He charges that Soulé and Bancroft, and subsequent historians who have relied on them as sources, have unfairly emphasized the involvement of Stevenson's men with the Hounds. While Biggs does well to try to balance the record

Contemporary cartoons poked fun at the fortune hunters and crooks who joined Stevenson's California Regiment. CHS Library.

on the regiment, his conclusion that "the myth of the Hounds sprang full-blown from the head of the journalist Frank Soulé" is unconvincing.

The text provides a running commentary on the accuracy of contemporary observers and later historians, and the bibliographical essay should serve as an indispensable guide for anyone wishing to pursue the subject further. Although the writing is generally clear and straightforward, a more careful editing of the book would have eliminated several ambiguous sentences and consolidated a number of chapters.

*A Yankee in Mexican California: Abel Stearns, 1798-1848.*

By Doris Marion Wright. (Santa Barbara: Wallace Heberd, 1977. 177 pp. \$12.50.)

Reviewed by Jack Mason, author of *Point Reyes—The Solemn Land and several other Marin County histories.*

Was Abel Stearns an opportunist who put his own fortunes ahead of his country's? Or a far-seeing pioneer deserving of more attention that Californians generally accord him? Naturally, the latter, or Ms. Wright's book would hardly have been worth the trouble.

Stearns came from Massachusetts in 1826, to Mexico first, then three years later to Monterey. By dint of Yankee gall, he became Southern California's leading trader in hides and liquors, with his personal port of entry at San Pedro. Eventually he was the biggest land and cattle owner in the South.

Abel's quarrels with the Mexican establishment are legendary. That he was a dealer in contraband is so obvious even Miss Wright accepts it as fact, although she is quick to apologize for him: "Smuggling was an old California custom . . . almost universal in colonial America. In simplest terms, it was a reaction to unwise legislation."

The governors resented Stearns, and two of them, Victoria and Chico, banished him. Not that anybody could keep the irrepressible Yankee down for long.

During the critical period before the American takeover, Stearns was eyes and ears at Los Angeles for Thomas Larkin—not as a "sub-confidential agent of the U.S.," as Bancroft says he was, but as a "confidential correspondent, which is quite another matter," as Ms. Wright points out.

Her chapter "Vulnerable California" is a good summing up of the uncertainties of the period, and she handles the principal players well: Governor Micheltorena, fastidious and vacillating; Commodore Jones, whose premature arrival at Los Angeles in 1843 spilled the beans concerning U.S. intentions towards California; and others including Antonio Osio, John Forster, Alexander Forbes, and David Spence.

In June of 1841, Stearns married fourteen-year-old Arcadia Bandini, "the most beautiful woman in California," and moved her into the pueblo's handsomest house. Whether he loved her, or was after her money, isn't clear. Miss Wright agrees with Bancroft, however, that the union prospered. On one other point she and Bancroft have no quarrel. Don Abel was ugly as sin.

Miss Wright is immoderately faithful to her sources, primarily the Stearns papers at the Huntington Library. Seemingly every statement is attributed. There are thirteen pages of bibliography. The portrait of Stearns suffers in consequence. Under such a load of erudition, he never comes quite alive.

*The Spanish Royal Corps of Engineers in the Western Borderlands: Instruments of Bourbon Reform, 1764-1815.*

By Janet R. Fireman. (Glendale: The Arthur H. Clark Co., 1977. 250 pp. Illustrations, appendix, index. \$16.95.)

*Reviewed by Theodore E. Treutlein, Professor Emeritus of History, San Francisco State University.*

When one thinks of the considerable amount of writing which over the years has concerned itself with the Spanish borderlands, it seems somewhat surprising that the author of the work under review can correctly claim that "until now, nothing whatsoever has been published bearing directly on the subject," i.e., the work of the Spanish Royal Corps of Engineers in the borderlands (Preface, p. 21). Yet the claim seems justified. Author Fireman acknowledges especial indebtedness to Professor Donald C. Cutter who encouraged her expressed interest in the Corps. Thus, self-motivated and with expert encouragement, she carried through an enormous labor of fundamental research in archives in Spain, Mexico, and the United States.

The Corps came into existence in April, 1711, when the Crown approved a suggestion by the Marqués de Verboom, a Flemish nobleman, but the author points out in Chapter 1, "Organization of the Corps," that the Corps became "truly significant" on the northern frontier only after the Seven Years' War. The remaining chapters bear the titles "Arrival in the Borderlands", "Reorganization of the Military Frontier," "Establishment and Defense of Upper California," "The Commandancy General of the Interior Provinces," and "Apache Warfare and the End of the Colonial Period."

Until the appearance of this work the best known engineer was Miguel Costansó, but perhaps students in borderland history now will also become acquainted with Francisco Fersén, Pablo Sánchez, Salvador Fidalgo, Alberto Córdoba, Manuel Agustín Mascaró, Juan de Papazaurtundúa, and José María Cortés de Olarte. The reviewer was particularly interested in the latter engineer's evaluation of the "Apache Question" (which emerges as one of the themes in this book). Engineer Cortés wrote an essay, "Memorias sobre las Provincias del Norte de Nueva España" in which he presents a "modern" view that "the Spaniards were as guilty of wronging the Apaches as the Indians were guilty of hurting the Europeans." He believed that the Apaches had to be pacified but that "peace through purchase" should be substituted for relentless warfare (p. 182).

Since the borderlands came into existence through "defensive expansion" of the Spanish empire, it is interesting to learn the views of the engineers on the question of the defense of California. Briefly, they believed that the coast was too extensive to be defended and that there were too few ships, too few batteries, too few artillerymen. If corsairs "were to launch an attack with a squadron and sizable landing forces . . . the only resort of commanders of Upper California would be to retire to the interior with the inhabitants" (pp. 207-208, the Sánchez, Fidalgo, Costansó Report, 1795). This statement is almost a blueprint for what happened in later years when Bouchard appeared on the California coast, or during the famous Commodore Thomas ap Catesby Jones seizure of Monterey.

The author states that "it is not possible to identify or quantify with assurance the Corps' contribution to the administration of the vast northern frontier. But it is possible to weigh and measure, or at least consider, this hitherto ignored institution of the frontier" (p. 188). This, the reviewer feels, Dr. Fireman has amply accomplished.





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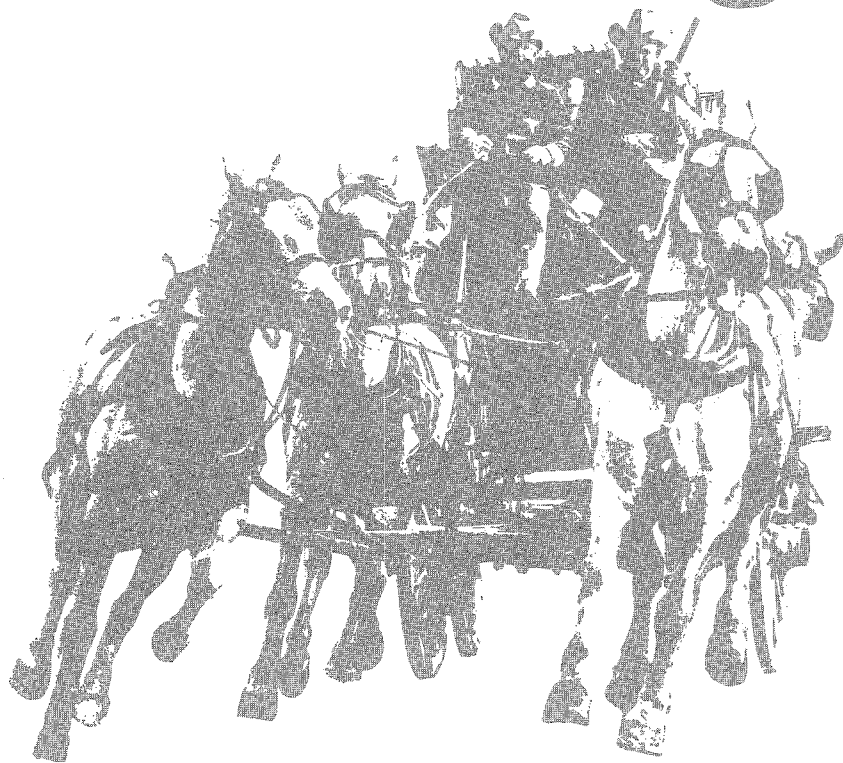
You would think it strange today for a Congressman or nobleman to become a printer. We did not. My father Henri was a nobleman who became a printer, because in 1500 printing was considered a noble art.

To amount to anything you must have a passion. I had three: printing, Latin and religion. I could think, write and talk as easily in Latin as in French, my native tongue. In my shop we talked nothing but Latin to each other. Hence you will frequently see my name in Latin as Robertus Stephanus. I was appointed King's Printer for Latin, Hebrew and Greek in 1540. I married Perette, the daughter of Badius Ascensius, a distinguished printer who was probably the first to use the picture of a printing press in his printing mark, so you see there was printer's ink in the family blood. My son, Henri II, became famous as a printer too. Our Estienne symbol was the olive tree, the fame of which has not

withered in four hundred years. ☞ Alas, my passion for perfection was my downfall. With the Royal Greek type which Claude Garamond engraved under my direction I produced a sumptuous New Testament in 1550. But because I dared to attempt improvements in its terminology, theologians were horrified, and they ran me bodily out of France, never to return. It was only after we lay moldering in our graves that justice came to me. My New Testament of 1550 was accepted by the world as the traditional text, and that is recognition enough for anyone. It is pleasant, too, for me to receive this belated accolade from such skillful and celebrated typographers as Mackenzie & Harris of San Francisco!

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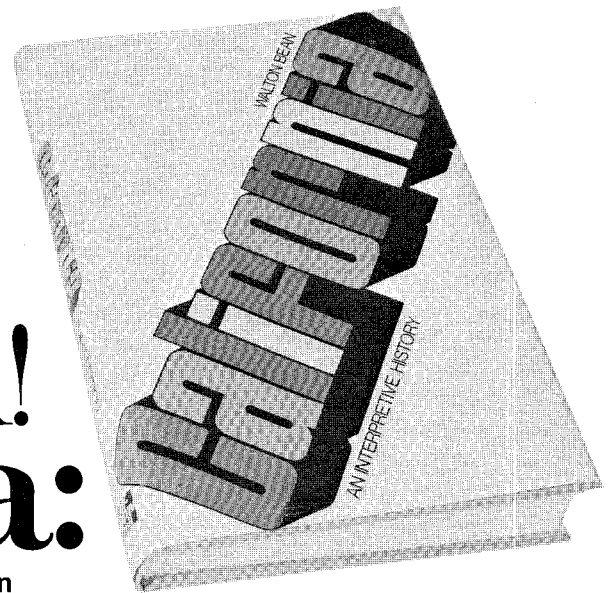
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